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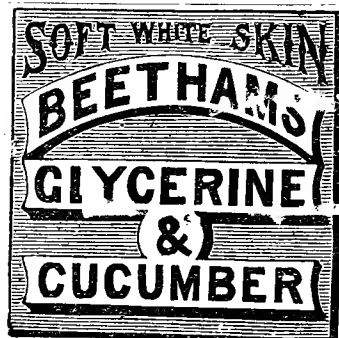
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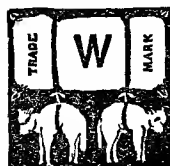
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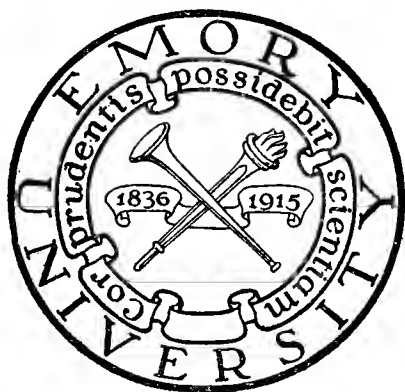
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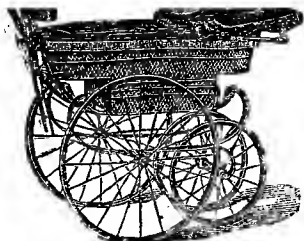
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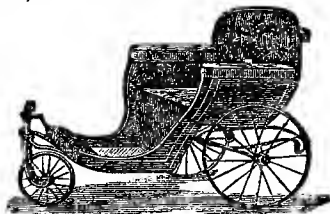
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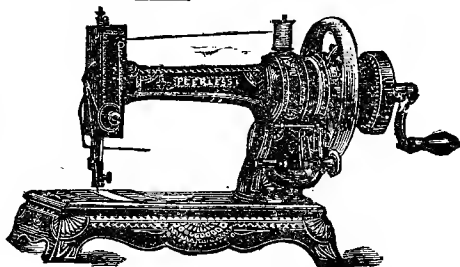


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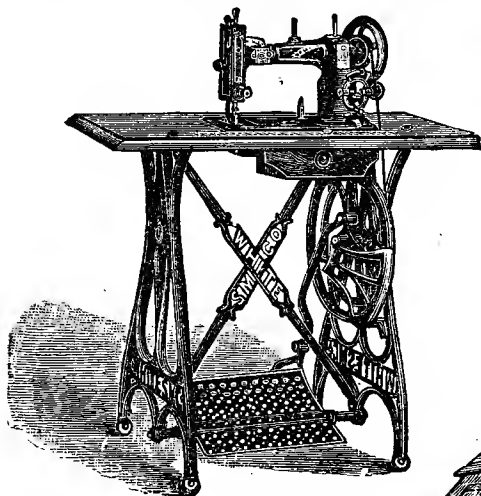
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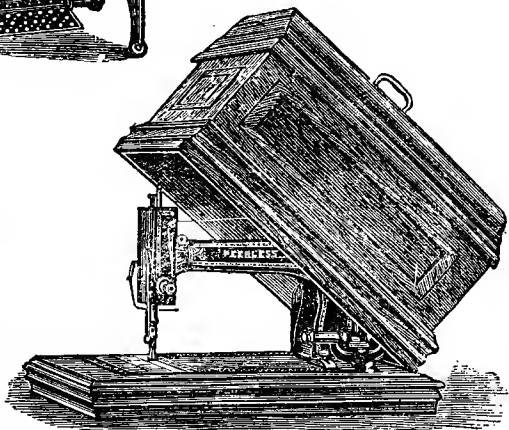


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EVERY INCH A SOLDIER

BY

M. J. COLQUHOUN

AUTHOR OF 'UNDER ORDERS,' 'PRIMUS IN INDIS,' ETC.



A NEW EDITION

London

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1889

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EVERY INCH A SOLDIER.

CHAPTER I.

A DEED OF BLOOD.

Not long before the Indian Mutiny of 1857 Richard Whitby, a man about thirty years of age, was a captain in the 38th Regiment, N.I., then quartered at Delhi. He was staying with his brother, who commanded a battery of artillery at the station of Meerut. Richard Whitby, though an ardent soldier, and one who had served in the first Afghan War, employed his leisure hours in the study of natural history. At some little distance from Meerut there is a grove of trees, containing sundry small temples and mausoleums, which last cover the bones of holy men of past generations; and these buildings are erected on the edge of an ornamental piece of water.

Whitby was wandering one evening, at dusk, in this grove, for the purpose of securing a specimen of a rare species of owl which he had observed in this semi-deserted locality. In order to obtain this bird of night he was crouching in the shade of an old edifice, with his gun ready in his hand, when suddenly there emerged out of the darkness one of those hideous-looking objects known in India as fakirs. The man, who looked scarcely human, was a stunted dwarf, strangely deformed, but yet apparently of great strength; his long, ill-kempt hair flowed over his shoulders, his head was covered with ashes, while the only clothing he wore was a leopard-skin mantle.

Whitby knew that this wretched creature had a great reputation for sanctity, and was credited by the ignorant with the possession of supernatural powers. He saw the

man enter the low-browed doorway of a ruined temple, and almost simultaneously with his disappearance therein, Whitby heard the most heart-rending shrieks and screams. The voice was that of a woman, seemingly in great terror. Then came a ringing report of a rifle, and all was still !

Whitby jumped to his feet, and in another moment he had entered the temple, and found himself in a small chamber massively built of cut stone, with an arched roof, lighted by one single lamp. By its dim rays he could see a young and beautiful Indian woman, evidently terror-stricken, and trembling like an aspen-leaf, and the body of the fakir was lying on the ground at her feet, while from a wound in his side the blood was slowly trickling. There was yet a third figure, that of a tall, handsome young Englishman, in the uniform of the 200th Regiment, who had a gun in his hand, and it appeared evident that he had been the assailant of the ascetic. Whitby looked at the Englishman, whose countenance was greatly agitated by rage and excitement.

‘ You coward ! ’ he exclaimed. ‘ How dared you fire on an unarmed man ? ’

The soldier, still beside himself with anger, answered :

‘ He was a brute, and deserved to be shot like one ! But I did not mean to kill him ! He first attacked me with a dagger ! ’

Just then was heard the sound of trumpets recalling the soldiers to barracks, and the man hastened from the temple unobserved by Whitby, who was leaning over the prostrate body of the fakir, with the humane intention of rendering what assistance he could. But he found that the man was dead—shot through the heart, and the dagger he would have used was still clenched in his hand.

Whitby addressed the young woman, but, though he spoke Hindostani perfectly, she either did not or would not understand him. He then left the temple with the intention of proceeding at once to the police, to give notice that this crime had been committed, and to secure the offender. Whitby was exceedingly indignant, knowing that the wanton murder of a man of such great local influence would be much resented by the population, and he deeply regretted that the culprit was an English soldier. He knew, of course, that offences of this kind were extremely rare, but his was a nature that detested anything that might appear like the

oppression of the weak by the strong. He reported the matter to the proper authorities, and then returned to his brother's house to dinner.

Whitby was not by any means a ladies' man, and his brother was a confirmed old bachelor. The 'gup' of the station seldom reached them; still, they had heard in a vague way of the charms of two new belles, Florence Rawley and Eleanor Wake, but, living much out of society—feminine society, at least—they had no personal acquaintance with these ladies.

Two days after the murder of the fakir, the brothers saw a carriage, in which some ladies were seated, drive through their grounds and draw up at their hall-door. Such an unprecedented event in their existence occasioned the two recluses no small surprise. They thought there must be some mistake, till a servant brought them three ladies' cards, on which were respectively inscribed the names 'Miss Rawley,' 'Miss Wake,' and 'Mrs. Coote.' With the latter lady they were slightly acquainted; she was the wife of the Paymaster of the 200th Regiment.

Two pretty girls, chaperoned by the matronly Mrs. Coote, now entered the ill-kept and roughly-furnished sanctum of the bachelor's abode, which had never before been trodden by such fairy feet.

Only one of the ladies seemed thoroughly at ease; this was Florence Rawley, a sweet-looking young girl. Miss Wake, a tall, handsome brunette, was much disturbed, and even Mrs. Coote appeared to be strangely agitated.

Florence was the spokeswoman of the party, and she plunged at once into the matter in hand.

'Captain Whitby,' she said, addressing the younger brother, 'we are told that you are going to prosecute Henry Brown—one of our men. Is this absolutely necessary? Could you not let the matter drop?'

Whitby looked with amazement at the exceedingly pretty girl who made this strange request of him. But the unimpressible naturalist merely answered, in a matter-of-fact tone:

'Oh! Then the villain has confessed? I did not know his name, and was not even certain to which regiment he belonged.'

'Then,' said Miss Wake, 'we trust to your honour not to

make use of the information we have so unwittingly given you.'

Whitby turned and looked at Eleanor Wake, and thought he had never seen a lovelier countenance. She was tall and slender, her complexion colourless, but beautifully white, with brilliant dark eyes, and finely arched eyebrows.

'You place me in a very difficult position,' he answered. 'It is certainly my duty to bring this criminal to justice.'

Eleanor's small mouth quivered with emotion, and the tears welled into her exquisite eyes.

'Have you realized the fact,' she said, 'that the dead man's wife wishes the affair to go no further? She is of respectable family, and being dragged into a police-court would be the ruin of her reputation, according to Eastern ideas.'

'No,' said Whitby, 'I had not thought of the matter in that light; but I cannot see that her prejudices should prevent justice being done.'

'Then, also,' pleaded Florence, 'Henry Brown's old mother is the best of women. If her son is hanged, or even imprisoned, the disgrace will certainly kill her.'

'A criminal's family, in such cases, is always to be pitied,' said Whitby; 'but still the offender must be punished.'

'You will at least promise not to use the information you accidentally obtained from us?' continued Florence.

'I promise that,' he answered gravely

The ladies talked for some time, using such reasons as they thought convincing; but Whitby was not to be turned from his intention of seeking out the man. The argument he found most irresistible was Eleanor's bursting into tears, covering her face with her hands, and sobbing as if her heart would break. The interview was becoming exceedingly painful to the brothers, yet the ladies seemed to show no intention of going away. How much longer they would have remained is uncertain; but seeing fresh visitors arriving in another carriage, they hastily took their departure, to the great relief of the gentlemen.

The Whitbys recognised the new arrivals as a Major Page and his daughter Louisa, very old and intimate acquaintances of theirs, although they had never before been honoured by a visit from Miss Page.

The Major was an old, eccentric, half-crazy retired officer, and as to the lovely Miss Page, Meerut society was rather

severe upon her. Ill-natured people called her 'the Griff's delight'; more envenomed tongues spoke of her as a 'garrison hack,' and she was even irreverently nicknamed 'Unlimited Loo!' She had been mainly educated in India, and the Whitbys had known her from her babyhood.

Major Page's principal craze was that the signs of the times were pointing to a universal kingdom; and, having an idea that the elder Whitby was a man open to conviction, as soon as he had entered the room he started talking upon his incoherent hobby.

After airing his notions about the 'White Horse of the Book of Revelation' with all the energy of firm belief, he continued:

'I tell you, Whitby, people know nothing—absolutely nothing! But I will educate them—from the atomic law up to the millennium! They think they know everything, but they must all have their noses brought to the grindstone;' and the Major rubbed his prominent crimsoned nasal organ violently with his withered old hand.

While he was thus rambling on, Miss Page went up to Richard Whitby.

'Come into the garden. I want to speak to you privately,' she said.

They left the Major still holding forth to John Whitby, and went into the garden, where, directly they were alone, Louisa said pettishly:

'Why did those girls and that woman, Mrs. Coote, come here?'

Whitby felt that it would be a breach of confidence to disclose the purport of their visit, and therefore made a vague diplomatic answer.

'Do you think the girls pretty?' continued Louisa. 'I do not.'

'I consider Miss Wake beautiful,' he answered.

'Oh,' she laughed, 'there's no accounting for taste! She is like a Maypole, and reminds me of the mathematical definition of a straight line—length without breadth! People rave about Miss Rawley, too. I don't admire her in the least. But, look here!' suddenly changing her tone: 'is it true that you are accusing a man of the 200th Regiment of murder?'

‘I accuse him of homicide, certainly! Whether it was justifiable or not, a jury must decide.’

‘I think it is very silly of you to meddle with what does not concern you,’ she answered.

‘But,’ he retorted, ‘surely it concerns you less?’

‘It concerns me very much,’ said the girl, turning red. ‘If you get that poor man hanged you will do me a great injury.’

‘Why, how can that be?’ he said. ‘What harm will it do you?’

‘Because—because—I know I can trust you, Dick—he is the only man I have ever, or shall ever, care for.’

‘Nonsense!’ said the amazed Whitby, who well knew that the fair Louisa’s love-affairs were perennial. Besides, *you*—in love with a private!’

‘He is a gentleman by birth, and may be a rich man some day.’

‘Well, from what I saw of him, I should say he is an unmitigated scoundrel.’

‘No, he is not. There is something peculiar—I call it ruffianism—about him, but that is what I like him for.’

‘There is no accounting for tastes,’ retorted Whitby, ‘I should pity his wife!’

Louisa turned and looked very keenly at him.

‘Then you would be wrong, Dick,’ she said. ‘That man has his faults—he has an uncontrollable temper—but he would give you his last sixpence.’

‘I have generally observed,’ said Whitby coolly, ‘that *that* sort of person never has sixpence to give.’

‘But,’ she pleaded, ‘will you drop this prosecution?’

‘No,’ answered Whitby.

‘Then,’ said Loo, ‘I shall never forgive you—never!’ and, like Eleanor Wake, she burst into tears, and they parted in anger.

This series of adventures left Richard Whitby very much perturbed in mind. Louisa’s passionate tears and reproaches very little affected him, but the heartbroken look on Eleanor Wake’s face he could not forget. Who was this man—this common soldier—who influenced women of such different types? That the high-caste Indian woman, the frivolous and worldly-minded Louisa, the confiding and childlike Florence,

and last, but not least, the noble-minded Eleanor—should all appear to be interested in the fate of one man seemed an utter mystery.

However, Whitby was not a person to be easily turned from his purpose, and he considered it his duty to see that this case was investigated by the proper authorities. But, when the police looked into the affair, it was found that the body of the fakir had disappeared, and his wife, the only other witness of the tragedy, was not forthcoming. Also, when Richard Whitby was called upon to identify the culprit from among eight hundred men, most of whom seemed alike in expression of countenance, he found the task more difficult than he had expected. He felt it would be unjust to fix suspicion upon an innocent man, and when he remembered Eleanor's mournful, pleading eyes, and even Louisa's angry tears, he was almost glad that circumstances obliged him to act in accordance with these ladies' wishes.

Some little time passed, and Whitby had returned to his own regiment at Delhi, when one day he was surprised to receive a visit from an Englishman, the emissary of the Newab of Doobghur. The gentleman's name was Sims, and he was a member of a well-known firm of solicitors in Calcutta. Mr. Sims informed him that some papers of importance belonging to the Newab had been lost. These papers had been in the possession of the murdered fakir, whose death Whitby had witnessed, and there was every reason to believe that they were now in the hands of the (at present) unknown English soldier who had committed that crime. Mr. Sims hinted, with lawyer-like caution, that no harm was intended to this individual, for, if the papers were restored, no question would be asked. Could Captain Whitby help him in any way? Whitby answered, with soldierly bluntness, 'that he knew nothing about the papers, and as for the scoundrel who had killed the fakir, he hoped that he would be hanged.' He recommended Mr. Sims to make inquiries in her Majesty's 200th Regiment at Meerut. The officers, he felt sure, would give him every information in their power, as it was impossible that the assassin could have utterly disappeared.

Mr. Sims inclined to the idea that this crime had been committed to obtain these papers; also, that the soldier was only the tool of others. However, there seemed to be a mys-

terious importance attached to the missing documents, the contents of which Mr. Sims was not authorized to divulge.

An element of anxiety had entered into Captain Richard Whitby's life. Was it possible that that beautiful and refined gentlewoman, Eleanor Wake, was in love with such a man as Henry Brown? Impossible! Then—was she in any way in his power? Louisa's extraordinary conduct, too! That girl was never over-scrupulous about speaking the truth. Was that heartless, selfish flirt really sincerely attached to a private?

Why had Brown murdered the fakir? For money? For papers? The shrewd mind of Whitby rejected the idea that plunder had been the man's object. He had seen on the soldier's face demoniacal rage and anger, but certainly neither craft nor greed.

He formed the resolve that, for Eleanor Wake's sake, he would find out the whole mystery.

CHAPTER II.

'UNLIMITED LOO.'

ENSIGN BURKE, of the 200th Regiment, like most youths of twenty, was in love. The present object of what he called his 'undying affection' was pretty little Florence Rawley, his commanding officer's only daughter.

Desmond Burke was a tall, handsome lad, with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, and golden hair, who was popularly known in his regiment as 'Paddy.' Possessing unfailing animal spirits, the sweetest temper, the lightest of hearts, this wild Irishman was a universal favourite, especially with the fair sex.

The Ensign was delighted when Captain Moore, of the 30th Hussars, said to him one morning:

'Come along, Paddy, and I will introduce you to Louisa Page. The fellows here call her 'Unlimited Loo,' which is rather a shame, for she is an awfully jolly girl. The father is an old lunatic—a rum card; but he made a lot of money in the Commissariat, so Loo is well gilded. Why don't you go in for her?'

'Oh! she wouldn't look at a poor beggar of an ensign like me; but I should like to know her.'

They drove in Moore's smart mail-phaeton, drawn by two fine bays, to the house of Major Page, which was in the Native Infantry Lines. It was a large thatched bungalow, situated in a well-kept garden bright with a mass of flowers. Moore handed their cards to the bearer, who, after a minute or two, returned, and, salaaming, said, 'Miss Baba salaam diya.' They accordingly followed the servant through the entrance-hall into an elegant apartment.

Louisa Page was reclining in a low chair. She rose as they entered, and motioned her visitors to seats which the bearer placed for them.

'Miss Page,' said Moore, 'allow me to introduce Ensign Burke, of the 200th Regiment, to you.'

She looked at Burke steadily for a few seconds with evident appreciation, for, like good Queen Bess, Miss Page had 'a keen eye for a likely man.'

'Mr. Burke and I do not meet quite as strangers,' she said.

The Irishman felt that it was very stupid of him, but he could not remember ever having been introduced to her before.

'You are somewhat altered since I saw you last,' she continued, addressing Burke; 'but I do not think I am mistaken in thinking I met you in Dublin.'

Burke smiled. Yes; he recollected Louisa Page as a demure little bread-and-butter miss, with neatly-braided hair, and shy, retiring manners; and now—— She was dressed in the latest extreme of a voluminous fashion, in a silky gauze of a light blue colour, while her flaxen hair curled round her lovely face and fell in studied carelessness on her shoulders. She had a pretty trick of pushing her curls behind her dainty ears whilst speaking. Three years before she had been a nice little schoolgirl, but now she was an enchantress. As she sat in the subdued light, tinted with pink from the window curtains, Burke was struck with the harmony of the soft colouring of her hair, complexion, and costume, and the general picturesqueness of her surroundings. She was undeniably fascinating; her smile was charming, her gray eyes seemed alternately suffused in liquid tenderness and sparkling in joyousness, although there did not seem to be much depth of feeling in their expression.

So you are going to get rid of us at last,' Miss Page,' said

Moore. 'Ah! we are all very melancholy at the thought of leaving, I assure you.'

'Yet I have heard you and the other fellows abuse the place dreadfully,' she said. 'Perhaps it was because you couldn't think of anything else to say.'

'We didn't know how well off we were. Now that we are going to say adieu to this station and Miss Page, perhaps for ever, we are all tremendously grieved.'

'I dare say you won't remember me for one day after your departure.'

'You say *that* because you know that you will forget us! Well, we are much obliged to you for having admitted us to the honour of your acquaintance. Fate snatches all our joy from us, but we'll endeavour to bear up as well as we can. But think of the old regiment sometimes, and don't let those fellows who are coming in cut us out entirely,' said Moore, in a tone which might have been somewhat satirical; but she accepted his words seriously.

'I don't suppose I shall admit any of them to the "honour" of my acquaintance, as you call it,' she said. 'Do you suppose I receive every gentleman who chooses to send in his card?' She smiled, and continued graciously: 'Of course, I shall always be glad to see Mr. Burke, whom I venture to consider an old friend. The slightest intimacy in the dear old country seems a bond of union when one meets in India.'

'I am delighted that you have not forgotten Dublin.'

'Oh! I am sure I shall never forget it. It is such a charming place! I paid a visit to Dublin, Captain Moore,' continued the gushing young lady, apparently thinking that she ought to give him a tureen of her favours, 'and I saw Mr. Burke there!'

'By Jove! quite a romance altogether!' said Moore. 'Fate evidently brings you together again.'

'Was not your cousin's name Carew?' she asked Burke. 'You see, I've an excellent memory; but, in truth, the sight of your name on your card recalled the event to my mind, and the other name came with it. But where is Mr. Carew? In England, I suppose?'

'No. He is on his way out to India. I am expecting him every day.'

'Really, Mr. Burke, you astonish me! It certainly does

seem as if Fate had something to do with it all, as Captain Moore says. Well, I sincerely hope Mr. Carew will come here. I should be very pleased to see him again. By-the-bye, is he in the army ?

'Oh no !' said Burke. 'He possesses a good estate in Essex, and belongs to no profession.'

On receiving this answer she made no reply, but turned to Captain Moore, and again led the conversation to his approaching departure and that of his regiment. She then allowed herself to be *persuaded* to present her portrait to their Mess photograph-book. As she rose to procure it, she proved to be taller, and in possession of a more fully-developed figure, than might have been expected from her appearance when seated half reclining on her chair. Her features, when in repose, looked less youthful than when she was smiling and chattering. At first she conveyed the impression of having quite a baby-face ; but, on closer inspection, her features were seen to be strongly marked. The brow was heavy for a woman, and the nose and mouth were inclined to be coarse and cruel. Yet her face was, altogether, wonderfully handsome, and the undulations of her figure, as the flimsy folds of her long dress clung around it, were full of grace.

As they made their adieux she apologized for the absence of her father, and told Captain Moore that she hoped to see him again before his regiment left. Finally, she bid an exceedingly cordial good-bye to Burke.

'What an extraordinary renewal of acquaintance !' observed Burke to Moore, as they drove away.

'So your friend Carew, whom she so well remembers, is a man of property, eh ?' said Moore. 'Ha !'

'Yes, he is very rich ; and, now I remember, he was quite gone on Miss Page. He will be glad to renew his acquaintance with her.'

A few days after his visit to the fascinating Louisa Page, Burke saw her cantering along the public promenade, with her light curls streaming in the wind, and her lithe figure swaying gracefully to the movements of her spirited little Arab. Two officers of Artillery, and another of the Staff, were in attendance on her, but he said to himself that Carew would have no difficulty in cutting them out, notwithstanding their gay jackets.

The following day he called upon her, and found her reclining under her punkah, pale, pensive, and dressed in white. She apologized for not rising as she motioned him to a chair with a gentle smile. She said she was suffering from headache, caused, she supposed, by the increasing heat of the weather, which rendered it necessary for her to keep quiet.

‘Perhaps I shall make it worse by talking to you?’

‘Oh no, Mr. Burke, thank you. I have been so dull all day. A little talk will do me good.’

‘So you will soon lose all your friends in Captain Moore’s regiment?’

‘Yes,’ she replied carelessly; ‘but I do not suffer overwhelming regrets on that account. ‘Oh, Mr. Burke,’ she continued, ‘I want to ask you about the man who murdered that fakir. Has he been found?’

‘No; but I am sure it was not one of our men. There is not such a blackguard in the regiment. But there’s a fool of a lawyer now come from Calcutta to look into the affair.’

Miss Page gave an involuntary little cry of alarm.

‘What has he come for?’

‘Oh, it seems there is some brute of a nigger swell mixed up in it. Maunders, my captain, saw the fellow, Sims, the attorney. He had a long rigmarole about papers, but Maunders shut him up, and told him that none of the men of his company were thieves.’

‘Then you think the matter is ended?’

‘Well, Sims is still poking about making inquiries, and that meddling fellow, Whitby, won’t keep quiet. He called upon our C. O., old Rawley, who told him, in his usual polite manner, to “go to the devil.” Now, if Whitby wasn’t a really good fellow, I should think he had got those papers (if there ever were any) himself. We chaffed him at our mess about his detective craze, and he got into no end of a rage; so then our fellows settled there must be a woman in the case.’

Miss Page looked ill at ease, and Burke could not help noticing it. ‘Unlimited Loo,’ false to her reputation, was no fun at all. She seemed to have exhausted her usual stock of lively sally and repartee. She said her headache was really very bad, so the gallant Ensign rose to take leave.

‘Must you go?’ she said, brightening up into vivacity. ‘I was so bored before you came. You will call again soon? Of course, you are going to the farewell party the Station is giving to the Hussars at Sirdhana?’

‘Yes. It will be an additional inducement to know that you are going. No party would be a success without Miss Louisa Page!’

‘And, for my part, I would not care to go ten miles unless I were sure of meeting some *very* agreeable fellows. But mind you let me know if anything turns up about that fakir business,’ she said, as she bade him farewell.

‘Awful fetching girl, that!’ soliloquized Burke, as he rode away. ‘But what can Unlimited Loo want to know about that murder for? She must have a taste for the horrible!’

CHAPTER III.

‘HOW HAPPY COULD I BE WITH EITHER.’

ENSIGN BURKE, with some other officers, was cantering gaily along, *en route* to the palace at Sirdhana, where the farewell entertainment to the Hussars was to be held. He was riding there in joyful anticipation of meeting his inamorata, Florence Rawley, and such was the fickle nature of the Ensign that he had altogether forgotten Louisa’s existence. The 200th Regiment had not been long in India. They had come from England in a sailing-vessel round the Cape, a voyage of some six months or so, during which, in the occasional storms and long calms of the tropics, he had been thrown into the closest intimacy with the gentle Florence, and had fallen in love with her.

Burke and his friends had reached Sirdhana, and there, in the glorious clear moonlight, before them lay the city, the palace, and the tall cupola of a Roman Catholic cathedral, with several large gloomy buildings, the habitations of priests, monks, and nuns, all relics of the noted Begum Somru, telling the romantic career of a woman who lived and died about seventy years ago, and who was first a slave, then a warrior, next a queen, and lastly, after long years, a bigoted convert of the Church of Rome!

But to return to our story. From the many windows of Begum Somru’s long-disused Italian-looking palace lights

flashed, and the gardens were illuminated with variegated lamps. Burke and his companions entered the lordly edifice, and went into a fine suite of rooms hung with oil-paintings of departed worthies.

In one of these great rooms dinner was laid on long tables, which were decorated with flowers and brilliantly lighted. There was a great number of persons present, and several ladies, who had ridden over, wore their riding-habits. Burke was fortunate enough to get a seat at one of the tables, and found himself next to that eccentric person, Major Page, and his beautiful daughter. Louisa hailed him with a happy glance of recognition, and introduced him to her father.

Major Page was a tall, well-formed, middle-aged man, with features not unintellectual-looking. But his mind, like an uncultivated garden, had run to seed, while a sunstroke, which had occasioned a severe fever, had partially deranged it. He was, however, sufficiently capable of performing his military duties, and, indeed, had made a considerable amount of money in the Hon. E.I. Company's service while on staff employment. In fact, he was sane enough in all practical relations of life till his head was fuddled with brandy-pawnee, which was usually the case every evening.

Burke had hardly commenced his dinner when the Major introduced the topic of Old Testament prophecy, and informed him that a new kingdom, to be called the Kingdom of the Isles, was to be founded on the ruins of all existing European monarchies, and that he, Major Page, was its destined ruler.

The Ensign felt slightly nervous while dining next to this remarkable man, and he began to think that, although 'Unlimited Loo' might be all that the most fastidious lover could wish, such a father-in-law would not be quite so desirable.

Miss Page did not talk, and Burke also was silent, so that papa continued his favourite topic. In the news which he had received from the last batch of English newspapers, he clearly perceived the commencement of the end of the existing state of affairs in the world. France and Italy were leagued against Austria, the other great Powers of Europe must soon be drawn into the conflict: the battle of Armageddon would be fought on the plains of Central Europe;

and the Millennium, the reign of universal peace, would be inaugurated shortly after.

The lady did not appear to notice the lucubrations of her parent, whose belief in the grandeur of his destiny began to be intensified with each glass of wine he drank. At length he became quite incoherent, just as the Ensign, with the other guests, were leaving the table to proceed to the drawing-room, where he followed them; but, after muttering something about ‘cupbearers’ and ‘frankincense,’ he fell asleep on a sofa, and snored.

‘Poor girl!’ thought Burke, as he looked at Louisa, ‘what a hard time she must have with this half-drunken, half-crazy father! I only hope Carew *will* come, and take her to his ancestral domains. She would be an ornament to a ducal mansion!’

A military band was playing in the grounds, and after dinner most of the guests were wandering about the wilderness of orange-groves which surrounded the building, when Burke’s delighted eyes caught sight of the slender figure of Florence Rawley walking alone in a broad gravelled pathway. She appeared to be either uneasy in her mind, or anxiously expecting to see someone; for she first walked briskly for about a hundred yards, then she stopped, and sent searching glances into the distant glade. At length, just as she appeared to have made up her mind to resign the person she had expected, a quick step came behind her, and Burke exclaimed gaily:

‘Good-evening, Miss Rawley! I hope you have not been long waiting for me.’

‘Oh no,’ answered the young lady, holding out her little hand for Burke to shake.

‘Then perhaps I have arrived too soon, and have put an end to some pleasant reverie? As I approached, you were so absent in mind that you did not hear me. Tell me, what were you thinking about?’

Florence hung her head a little, and said:

‘The subject is not worth mentioning.’

‘It was not a pleasant subject, then?’

‘I don’t know,’ she said, blushing slightly.

‘Oh, Miss Rawley!’ said the Ensign, suddenly plunging into sentiment with a fervour worthy of the days of the Troubadours, ‘I hoped you were thinking of me! I should

be so happy if I dared to think I ever entered into your thoughts.'

'Do you ever think of *me*?' said the lady softly.

'Do I? I'm *always* thinking of you. I can't get your pretty face and sweet voice out of my mind. I try to drive them out, but they will return and fascinate my too-susceptible heart.'

'How unkind to want to drive them out!'

'What business has a poor ensign, with only eighteen hundred pounds in the world beside his pay, to cherish such a lovely vision?'

'Have you really so much money? Why, how rich you are!'

'Don't chaff, Florence. It's cruel to be so satirical.'

'But I wasn't satirical. Desmond, is not eighteen hundred pounds a large sum of money?'

'It would look a lot if piled up in a heap of sovereigns, but it only represents ninety pounds per annum at five per cent.'

'Oh, Mr. Burke,' said Florence, after a little pause.

'You called me Desmond just now,' replied the gentleman, in an injured tone.

'Well, then, *Desmond*. I have a favour to ask of you. My cous—I mean to say the cousin of an old acquaintance of ours has enlisted as a common soldier in our regime. He is in your company, and I want you to do what you can for him,' said Florence earnestly.

'Certainly,' said Burke. 'I shall only be too happy to do anything for him, if in serving him I shall be serving you.'

'His friends have bought his discharge, and papers are daily expected. Will you try and get leave for him to go at once?'

'I will do all I can,' said Burke; 'but you seem to take a deep interest in this young man.'

'Oh yes, of course; that is to say, rather. You know, he is the son of an old friend.'

'Ah, exactly. By-the-bye, what's his name?'

'Henry—Henry Brown.'

'Brown? Brown? Oh, I know. He is a gentleman—when he comes for his pay he always wears a clean shirt.'

'Is that a sign of being a gentleman?' asked Florence,

laughing. 'But thank you very much. I am sure you will do all you can.'

All opportunity for further confidential conversation between the young lovers was at an end, because a short but erect soldierly-looking man came up to them. The most marked features of his face were a hooked nose and an immense white moustache. He walked with a firm, sounding footstep, and the stern expression of his keen blue eyes seemed the embodiment of military discipline. Burke felt an irresistible inclination to hide his tall form behind a neighbouring bush, for the advancing figure was no other than his formidable commanding officer!

Florence was not in the least dismayed. She smiled sweetly in the old veteran's face, saying:

'Isn't it a glorious night, father dear? and isn't it a heavenly party?'

'Yes, yes, my dear; but it's getting late, and some of us have to be up at gun-fire—haven't we, Mr. Burke?—so we had better go home.'

'Very well,' she answered pleasantly.

Farewells were quickly spoken, and the old man whisked his daughter away from the gaze of the disappointed youth.

Burke thought, 'Isn't it a beastly shame to take Florence away so soon!' and he wandered sulkily down the broad paths of the orange-groves.

In the brilliant moonlight everything could be seen almost as clearly as in the daytime, although the orange-trees here and there cast intensely black shadows upon the path.

The lovelorn Burke began to reflect that as he had been so cruelly deprived of Florence's agreeable companionship, the best thing he could do would be to console himself with the society of 'Unlimited Loo,' whose lively sallies were sure to be good fun.

What *was* a fellow to do who had been so utterly sold as he had been? He had hoped to have ridden home with Florence. Thank Heaven, he could still enjoy the charm of female society, and he would try to escort the fair Loo instead. He re-entered the brightly-lighted palace, where some chaperons and other elderly people were playing whist. The Major still reposed upon the sofa in audible slumber. Burke searched through all the rooms, bowing pleasantly here and there to people he knew. He ex-

changed a few words with Miss Wake, Mrs. Coote, and Whitby, who was again in Meerut on leave; but he failed to see the tall striking form of Louisa Page.

Of course she was out in the gardens with some fellow or other! It wasn't Moore, of the 30th Hussars, however, for he was playing a rubber; so the Ensign returned to the moonlit garden. He passed many happy groups of people, and many still happier men and maidens walking side by side, absorbed in each other's society.

He reached a remote and silent part of the grounds where the orange-grove was very dense. He could see no one, but from behind a cluster of bushes he heard a woman's shrill voice say, in tones of taunting anger:

'When is there to be an end to this idiocy? You must be mad to get into such disgraceful rows. You thundering fool! I don't care how much you injure *yourself*, but you have no right to drag others down with you! Why did you come here?'

Burke thought, 'Some poor devil of a married man is catching it, and no mistake!' Then he heard the man so cruelly upbraided laugh—a cool, contemptuous laugh.

'Oh, you may laugh!' cried the vixen, 'but it is no laughing matter.'

'Then you won't help me!' said a man's voice.

'That I won't,' she retorted. 'You'll see no more of *my* money.'

Burke, not caring to play the eavesdropper any longer, now commenced to whistle noisily. He heard the rustle of feminine garments as the woman, evidently startled, hastened away still farther into the dense grove; and then in the moonlight, at a little distance, he saw a tall, powerful-looking figure rapidly crossing the path, and by the momentary glimpse he obtained, he fancied the man was dressed in the uniform of a private of his regiment. 'If so, what was one of our men doing here at this time of night?' he thought; 'and why the devil did he choose this place to quarrel with that female Tartar?' But, then, the Ensign reflected, 'he may be one of the band, or a mess sergeant; but what an enterprising virago that woman must be to come after him here! Mrs. Tommy Atkins is rather a caution.'

Burke chuckled to himself as he thought of one of their regimental legends, which was as follows: A private who

had got married was asked by his officer how he liked his new condition of life. The man replied: ‘Well, sir, it is like this. Before I was married, Mary always used to say, “Come in, my honeysuckle.” Now, before I enter, she shouts, “Clean those hoofs of yours, you son of a ramrod!”’

Burke then strolled on, and his persevering search was rewarded at last, for he met Miss Page in the grounds, and accompanied her back into the palace. Her tall and well-proportioned figure showed to great advantage in her habit. She had elected to ride from Meerut, and had been escorted to Sirdhana by Captain Moore and a select party of the gallant Hussars.

When the hour for departure came, Louisa—having stayed to a very late Bohemian supper, which none of the other ladies patronized, and where the men smoked, *sans gêne*—said to Burke:

‘I’ll give you a lead ’cross country to Meerut! Some of those fellows, I think, will find it difficult to get home to-night.’

It was a fine helter-skelter ride back in the clear moonlight, for the country, as a rule, was a dead-level, without hedges, and the only jumps were over small watercourses; Burke, who was himself a good rider, could not help seeing how particularly well Miss Page looked mounted, and how thoroughly at home she was in the saddle.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORDERLY-ROOM.

‘Did you see daybreak this morning, Tim?’ asked one soldier of another.

‘Yes, faith! and I did; and it broke with a mighty great noise!’

This also was the opinion of Ensign Burke, when at the very earliest streak of dawn he was awakened by the roar of the morning gun. He had had but a few hours’ sleep, and, like the historical sluggard, would have ‘slumbered again,’ had not his pertinacious bearer monotonously murmured by his bedside the diurnal liturgy of ‘Sahib! Sahib! Sahib!’ and commenced the accustomed ceremony of pulling on his master’s stockings while he was in bed.

Burke knew that his hour had come, and submitted to the inevitable. Then, in a whirlwind of ministering attendants, all devoted to the sweet-tempered lad—the water-carrier, who had brought his cold bath in a skin; an old man with a cup of hot tea, which he assiduously cooled by blowing and stirring it; a boy with his sword, to which he was giving a final polish with a dirty rag; and another, who obsequiously held his forage-cap—the Ensign rushed from the house, threw his long legs over one of the most diminutive of ponies, and ‘by the skin of his teeth,’ as he said, barely escaped committing the unpardonable crime of being late on parade. He was, of course, followed on foot by a thin, long groom, who tore after the galloping pony, and by some peculiar provision of nature was able to arrive at the parade-ground as soon as his master!

When Burke found himself on the flank of his company he began, as usual, to speculate upon his colonel’s temper, and his constitutional bad language.

There he was, mounted on his white charger, fiercely facing his men, a great number of whom were young soldiers but lately recruited, who still retained many of the, in his opinion, despicable characteristics of the civilian, and whose ignorance and rawness vexed the soul of the stern old martinet.

Colonel George Rawley had worn a red coat in a variety of climates for forty years, without the vigour of his constitution being apparently much impaired thereby. ‘The army swore a great deal in Flanders,’ and the veteran carefully preserved the traditions of the time when her Majesty’s forces fought hard and used strong language.

‘Open column right in front!’ Rawley was shouting in a stentorian voice which might have been heard through the roar of cannon on the battle-field; ‘right-about face! Sergeant-Major, mark down that flank man of number four! What do you mean, sir, by not facing at the last sound of the word? I’ll march you round the square till you *do* know your drill. Right-wheel, quick march! Steady there, number seven, halt! My Gad! I’ll keep you doing it until you *can* do it correctly. As you were, front! left-wheel into line, quick march! Steady officers! My Gad, Mr. Burke, don’t you know how to dress your men yet? Steady! look to your front! that man in the rear rank of number

two ; let me see if you *can* do it this time. Open column right in front ! Right-about face, right-wheel, quick march ! Steady, now ! Look to your men, Captain Maunders ! Don't give the word of command in that way, Mr. Burke, "Halt-frontdress" ; say, Halt ! front ! dress ! My Gad ! I'll keep you to your drill ;' and so on, and so on. After an hour or two of this sort of thing, old Rawley dismissed them, and, returning the salute of his officers by a slight touch of his old-fashioned forage-cap, dismounted from his horse, and went off in the direction of his orderly-room.

'Rawley's not in the sweetest of tempers to-day,' said our rosy-cheeked Ensign as the officers sheathed their swords and strolled towards their mess, with the view of recruiting their bodies and minds after the fatigue and worry they had just undergone.

'Confound him,' muttered Captain Maunders, an officer of two-and-forty, in whose moustache appeared a few streaks of gray, 'the army's not fit for a gentleman any longer.'

'Orderly-room, sir,' said a smart young corporal with a vellum-covered book under his arm, coming up to Captain Maunders and saluting ; 'the Colonel's there, and the prisoners have just gone up.'

'Very well, corporal, take the book there. Confound it,' growled the Captain again, 'I never knew such a place as this ; nothing but bother from morning till night. By-the-bye, I forgot ! Here, Burke,' he continued, addressing the Ensign, who was junior subaltern of his company, 'you must go to the orderly-room, I'm on a Board ! I've signed the crimes and all that ; let old Rawley do what he likes with them. Stay, though. There's one man I want to get off ; a decent sort of fellow who joined not long ago ; let me see, what was his name ? Bless me ! I forget it, but Sergeant Walker will know.'

With a grunt of satisfaction at having got rid of a disagreeable duty, the Captain hurried up the steps of the officers' mess-house, leaving the Ensign to wend his way towards the orderly-room, the office wherein the business of the regiment was transacted.

At the door stood a group of non-commissioned officers with portfolio-like books under their arms, and in an adjoining yard was a line of soldiers, with dirty and dismal countenances, guarded by two privates with drawn bayonets,

These were the prisoners who were to be brought up before the commanding officer to receive military justice for the various faults which they had committed.

As the Ensign approached, the non-commissioned officers all stood to 'attention.' A stout, jovial-looking sergeant, of about six feet three inches in height, advanced from the rest, and, handing to him the book which he carried, said :

'There are four men up, sir. There's one man—Brown—that Captain Maunders wished to get off if possible, as he wants to employ him in the orderly-room ; he's received a good education, sir, and it's his first offence.'

'What has he done ?'

'He was absent yesterday from afternoon and evening roll-calls, and did not return till twelve at night.'

'Was he drunk ?'

'No, sir ; he was sober—came in by himself.'

'All right,' said the Ensign ; 'I will attend to it ;' and taking the book from the sergeant, he walked into the orderly-room, where two or three officers were waiting the arrival of the Colonel from his private office.

'“Morning,"' Burke,' said one. 'The old business again—eh ? There never was such a place as this for work.'

'Awful place,' added another. 'One has to be perpetually hanging about the barracks, or orderly-room, or some cursed hole or other ! There's never a chance of getting into "mufti" before twelve o'clock.'

A loud 'T'chun' (which to the initiated meant 'Attention') was heard outside, and Colonel Rawley entered, followed by his Adjutant, and seated himself at a deal table, which constituted the principal furniture of the apartment.

'Bring in the prisoners, Sergeant-Major,' he said, looking down a long list of names placed before him. Meanwhile the officers got the books they carried in readiness, which contained records of the misdeeds of the men of their companies, and are called 'Defaulters' Books.' Their duty was to inform the Colonel of the general character and previous convictions of such of their men as were now to be brought before him.

After a number of cases had been disposed of, it was the turn of the four men of Burke's company.

'Halt ! front !' said the Sergeant-Major, marching in the first, and placing him in a convenient position beneath the

dread eye of the commanding officer. The Ensign then handed the Colonel a slip of paper, called the 'Crime,' in which was written, by the orderly corporal of the day, in a round, schoolboy hand, the name of the offender, and the offence of which he had been accused.

'No. 2,405, Private William Biggs,' read out the Colonel, 'absent from tattoo roll-call on the night of the 21st, and not returning till the night of the 23rd. How long has this man joined?'

'Only three months, sir,' replied the Ensign, referring to his book. 'He's a recruit.'

'Is his kit all right?'

'Yes, sir,' said the sergeant of his company, who was in attendance.

'How dare you keep away all that time, sir?' said the Colonel, addressing the culprit, a wretched-looking youth, with a pallid countenance and tangled hair, whose coarse red jacket hung loosely on his gaunt frame. 'One, two, three days—my Gad! I will stop your pay for three days, sir—it will cost you one rupee—and if you do it again I'll put you in the cells. Have this man's hair cut, Sergeant-Major. I never saw such a dirty, disreputable soldier. Examine his kit, Mr. Burke, and see that he has not sold his boots. My Gad! Three days' pay stopped! March him away, Sergeant-Major, and keep him till his hair's cut.'

'Right-about face, quick march!' said the Sergeant-Major.

The next man tried to assume an appearance of profound penitence, which was much spoiled by a very visible black eye.

'Miles O'Connor!' roared out the Colonel again, 'found drunk and fighting by the picket. My Gad! You dirty ruffian, what do you mean by fighting and blackguarding about the streets?'

'Oh! if you please, Colonel, if ye'll luk it over this toime, I'll niver do it agin!'

'It's his first time drunk this year, sir,' interposed Burke, from his book.

'Lucky for you, sir—my Gad!' continued the Colonel, looking savagely from under his shaggy eyebrows at the intemperate Milesian; 'but I'll march you about that

square! Six days' drill, and confined to barracks till his eye gets well!

John Coven was the next. 'Absent from tattoo roll-call, and brought in by the picket at a quarter past ten, drunk.'

'Please, Colonel! I'm an old soldier,' urged the man in extenuation.

'My Gad! I know you. Old soldiers, old blackguards! Young soldiers, young blackguards! When was this man last up for drunkenness?'

'He was up in April,' answered Burke, from his book. 'It's his third time this year.'

'I'll bring you before a court-martial for habitual drunkenness, the *next* time you come here!' said the Colonel. 'Six days' drill, and confined to barracks.'

Henry Brown was the last on that list, and this was the man about whom the sergeant had spoken to Burke. He was a tall, well-built, soldierly-looking young fellow, about five-and-twenty years of age, with a fresh colour, notwithstanding his confinement during the preceding night in the guard-room.

'This man has not been up before, sir,' said Burke; 'he's a very good fellow, and has been useful in the orderly-room.' He spoke with the greatest enthusiasm and candour, because he remembered that this was the man in whom Florence was interested.

'Don't you come before me again, sir,' said the Colonel sternly to the culprit, whose features appeared to express a struggle between recklessness and shame. 'I'll look over it this time as it's the first offence! Examine his kit, Mr. Burke, and have his hair cut,' he concluded, dismissing the case.

The Ensign now resigned his place at the side of the commanding officer to a handsome captain, with a curly moustache, whose face exhibited intense weariness, combined with dutiful resignation. In those days captains of infantry usually paid some £2,000 for their commission, receiving pay which barely gave them interest for the capital. Burke then returned the 'Defaulters' Book' into the hands of the sergeant, and requested him to look at the offenders' kits, according to the Colonel's order. He then proceeded to the ante-room in the officers' mess-house, to read the newspapers.

Captain Maunders, who had not yet gone to his 'Board,' was perusing a journal, with an expression of disgust upon his face. He was reading the *Gazette*. 'Ugh!' he muttered, half addressing Burke, 'Blakiston not gazetted out yet! I don't believe he's ever going—or, if he does, the Horse Guards will bring in somebody from half-pay, and it won't be a step in the regiment. Ugh! I must be off to my Board, confound it! Here's the *Times*, Burke. Settled the orderly-room business, I suppose?'

'Yes. Rawley did not give that man anything, who——'

'Ah! I know. He seems to be a respectable young fellow, well educated, and so forth, but got into debt, and was fool enough to enlist! Much better have swept a crossing! I suppose old Rawley was as pleasant as usual in the orderly-room?' So saying, the Captain, with a slight struggle, buckled his sword-belt round his waist, and departed. The Ensign, when he had left, looked over the papers, and, after a while, proceeded to his quarters, where he exchanged uniform for mufti, having no more military duties that day.

As the prisoners were being marched back to barracks, Captain Whitby, of the 38th Regiment, N.I., happened to be taking his usual morning ride. He glanced keenly at the group of military criminals and their guard. He noticed the wretched-looking Biggs, with his pale face, and the disfigured optics of Miles O'Connor, the hardened look of that old offender, John Coyen, and, lastly, the tall and manly-looking Henry Brown.

Brown was furious at the humiliating position he was now occupying, and his fierce countenance expressed both anger and disgust. Whitby instantly recognised him, and saw that the recognition was mutual. 'That was the wretch who had shot the fakir, but the man should not escape again!' He determined to inform Sims at once of the whereabouts of the criminal, and going to the hotel where he lodged, found him at home. Then he started off to the house of the Cantonment Magistrate, but failed to find him.

As to the handsome defaulter, Henry Brown, directly he was dismissed he went to his quarters, and spent part of the day on his barrack bed, in the semi-darkened room. His temper did not improve. He had been let off, it was true ;

there was some small comfort in that ; yet, although an utterly reckless dare-devil, he could not but feel a little anxious as to his future. Captain Whitby had that morning evidently recognised him when they met, although he had failed to do so before ; and, besides, Sims had not given up the search for those papers ! ‘ I was a fool to enlist,’ he said to himself. ‘ This life is a hell upon earth ! I did it for *her* sake, and now she despises me ! I must either buy my discharge, or—desert ! Ah ! I have it ! I know what I shall do !’

CHAPTER V.

A MINISTERING ANGEL.

IN the dusk of approaching night Henry Brown climbed the low mud wall which enclosed the grounds belonging to Major Page’s bungalow. Like a thief, he stole stealthily, first through the kitchen-garden, and then through the park-like ground close to the house, keeping well in the dense shadow of the trees. Having thus entered by a back way, he proceeded to a French window opening on the garden, the venetian blinds of which were shut. He gave a sharp authoritative knock at the closed casement—no notice was taken of his imperative summons at first ; but he continued to rap in no very gentle manner, until after a time the window was opened by Louisa Page, who was becomingly dressed in an elaborate toilet of flowing muslin and lace.

She said angrily, while her countenance denoted extreme displeasure :

‘ I have told you not to come here. You will get me talked about in this gossiping station.’

Brown walked into the room, and stood leaning against the frame of the open window.

‘ Have you thought over what I said to you in the orange-grove at Sirdhana, last night ?’ he asked.

‘ I thought you were either mad or drunk,’ she retorted fiercely.

‘ You don’t care a brass farthing for me now,’ he said bitterly.

‘ No, I don’t ! and it’s your fault that I don’t. You get into every sort of disgrace and low villainy. God knows I *was* fool enough to care for you once. Now I hate you.’

'None of your tantrums, Loo. There never was such a vixen as you are. Stop your row for one minute, and listen to me.'

'If you think I am going to help you again out of your scrapes, you are very much mistaken,' she retorted.

'Now, don't play the fool, Loo; there is not time for it now. Can't you keep that fellow Whitby quiet?'

'No. You sent me there on a fool's errand. He won't listen to me.'

'Well! your fascinations failed for once,' he sneered.

'Save me from my friends,' she said crossly. 'I have known him ever since I can remember, and this is the first time I have asked a favour of the wretch, and he was as rude and nasty as possible, the brute.'

'Bad language won't help us,' said Brown.

'Have you got those papers that Sims wants? Speak the truth for once,' she snapped.

'Yes!' he said calmly; 'I have those papers, and I mean to keep them.'

'What good are they to you?'

'Only that through them I intend to become one of the richest men in the world.'

'Some more of your wild ideas,' she said. 'You must be mad.'

'No, I am not. As usual, you jump to a conclusion, and are quite wrong.'

'Well, then, you can come back to me when you *are* a rich man. I loathe paupers, and beggars.'

'So I will, Louisa. I know you are a mercenary young person. You bully a fellow when he is down upon his luck, but you would fawn upon him if his pockets were full.'

'And why not? I am not like you, who perform vile actions from high-falutin virtuous motives. I do not think much of heroes who first kill their neighbours out of pure chivalry, and then rob them.'

'Now, don't drive a fellow mad!' exclaimed Brown, whose patience was nearly exhausted. 'I am not such a fool as to think you *could* understand a disinterested action.'

'No,' she answered. 'I certainly would not try to get myself hanged through helping strangers. It was no business of yours to interfere. "Que diable allait il faire dans cette galère?"'

Brown laughed.

'You've hit the right nail on the head this time!'

He had at heart an unbounded respect for Louisa's shrewd, worldly common-sense, which, in its own line, amounted to genius; and, like most men, he could not resist the glamour of her marvellous physical attractions.

'I suppose I *was* a fool,' he continued, 'to redress the wrongs of the weak; but, as in moral tales, the good boy has received a cake. As a reward for my absurd good-nature, I am on the high road to fortune.'

'Oh, another of your hallucinations!' she sneered. 'I wish to Heaven your good fortune would give you another garb to wear. I hate to see you in the dress of a common soldier.'

'Well, nobody could wish for a change more than I do. If you only knew how I loathe this place! The barracks and the parade ground; the broad roads, with the houses of my superiors standing in gardens; that braying band; the men; the officers; even the English ladies are hateful to me, so that I cannot conceive the lowest hell more hot, or more unlovable than this heaven-forsaken spot. After all, my experience of a sponging-house,' he said with great bitterness, 'is, that it was a cheerful place compared to the barracks of Meerut.'

'Do you dislike it so much?' she asked.

'Yes. And so would you, if you had to rise at four, gun-fire as they call it, to live with dirty brutes of soldiers in a room no better than a prison, to be drilling, doing fatigue duty the livelong day, and to be mixed up with the set of which our regiments are composed. Whatever my sins are, I expiate them in this wretched life! However, some alleviation comes even to the most luckless, and I see an end to my misfortunes at last.'

'I am out of patience with your insufferable buoyancy,' she answered. 'All the scrapes and follies that you have hitherto pulled through are nothing compared to the horrible mess you are in now. And as to getting out of it, you never will.'

He said earnestly: 'Louisa, I swear to you, if you can get me £50, and buy my discharge as well, that I can, and will, make a provision for your future far exceeding even your most soaring ambition.'

'I am sick of your folly,' she answered; 'and I can't stand here listening all night to your rubbish. Dinner is waiting, and I am hungry. You had better go back to barracks, and, instead of dreaming of untold wealth, try to wriggle out of this idiotic affair. Swear hard. There's only Whitby's word against yours. He is a moony fool poking after birds and beasts; no one thinks much of him. Your officers, too, especially that wild Irishman Burke, will stick by you; they don't want to have their regiment disgraced. Such a fuss, after all, about a disgusting native and a bundle of papers!'

'Will you get me that money or not, Louisa? You have plenty.'

'I have not enough even for myself,' she retorted. 'I am not going to support you. Now go, for Heaven's sake, before anyone sees you.' She stepped towards the window with a commanding gesture, and he made no answer, but, with a sigh of disappointment, stepped out into the darkness; while she, with a motion of ill-humour, carefully closed the shutters behind him.

Brown, feeling deeply hurt, strode on, along the level roads, with a step which seemed to have lost its elasticity. 'Her heart is like a nether millstone,' he thought, 'but it is wonderful the hold those capricious women have over us. To-night she was as cutting as a north-east wind; to-morrow, like a weather-cock, she will veer round due south, and be mildness itself, especially if I become a millionaire, as I expect. But I must have ready-money. I hate sponging on Eleanor. *She* would give me everything she possesses, though that is not much, poor girl! I hope I shall have time to see her for a few minutes, before those vile trumpets call me back to that God-forgotten hole.'

Through the darkness, he at length arrived at a summer-house or kiosk, which stood far away in the grounds attached to Colonel Rawley's house, and which was hidden from prying eyes by the dense vegetation of the tropical plants which grew round it. He could see a glimmer of light, which cheered him, as he then saw that the assignation he had previously arranged with Eleanor would be kept. As soon as he approached the door of the kiosk, a woman rushed forward, and, throwing her arms round his neck, said:

'I am so glad you wrote that you would come to see me

to-day. Such good news! Such glorious news! Come in, Harry, Florence is here!' And Eleanor Wade led Brown into the small building.

Miss Rawley rose and shook hands warmly with Brown.

Eleanor continued: 'The English mail is in, and they have sent the money for your discharge; and, what is too delightful, old Uncle Tom, also, has stumped up £400 to buy your commission! He went to the Horse Guards himself about it, and, making use of your father's and grandfather's military services, managed the whole thing. Florence heard her father say, this afternoon, that some of the papers have arrived, but you will have to wait until everything is settled at Headquarters. That will take some weeks probably, and then, dear old boy, you will be able to resume your proper position in society. You have sown all your wild oats now, Harry, and will be very careful, won't you? for my sake. You will never know what I have suffered on your account!'

A kind of spasm passed over Brown's handsome face; for the unexpected good news almost took away his breath.

'Good God!' he said at last; 'Nellie, it can't be true!'

'It is true, darling,' she said cheerfully; 'read the letters for yourself,' and she put some papers in his hand.

'You little brick!' he exclaimed delightedly, 'it is all *your* doing.'

'Did you think I should leave a stone unturned, when you were in such trouble? I did not tell you before what I was doing, because if I failed—which seemed more than likely—it would have been such a bitter disappointment for you.'

'Oh, Nell!' he said, 'how good and kind you are!'

He walked up and down the little summer-house, deeply agitated.

'If that fakir business turns up again, I am ruined! Nellie,' he said, 'I fear that Whitby has recognised me at last, and I cannot escape trial! They would never give a commission to a man who had been accused of a criminal offence. If I had money I would desert—but then—that would make things worse. What am I to do?'

'Harry,' said Eleanor, with great tenderness in her sweet voice, 'do not disturb yourself about that. I will go to Captain Whitby and tell him the whole story. He will, I am sure, exonerate you, as he is a high-minded, chivalrous man.'

'Yes; but people say "there is no smoke without fire." This affair will always be against me, if once brought into open court. I would give worlds to get away now for a time, if only to throw some people off the scent. Besides, I have a scheme which would be most advantageous for me if I could carry it out. Eleanor dear, can you get me £50? I feel like a brute, asking you for money, after all your goodness, but I am sure I can soon repay you. I cannot go on leave without money. Both the officers of my company are kindly disposed towards me, and would help me to get furlough. If I only had £50, I would apply for it at once. I feel as if my mind will give way unless I can leave this cursed place for a time!'

The two girls talked together in low tones for a time, and then asked Brown to remain there while they went into the house.

They speedily returned, and Eleanor put a small parcel into Brown's hands, saying:

'Florence and I have managed it for you, dear. We had not quite enough money—girls never have much, you know—but there's my watch and chain and Florence's gold bracelet, which you must sell.'

'Oh! Miss Rawley,' he said, 'I really could not accept such a sacrifice from you.'

'Yes, yes, you must!' Florence answered. 'I would go through fire and water to help Eleanor; and besides, I do not care for bracelets—I never wear them—so it is not much of a gift.'

'No, Miss Rawley,' he said firmly; 'I cannot—will not take it as a gift, but a loan, which I will soon repay. Ah! There goes the recall. I must get back.'

Eleanor kissed him passionately.

'Good-bye, my poor darling! Get your leave to-morrow. Florence will see that the Colonel puts no difficulty in the way. Keep up your heart, Harry; there's a good time coming yet!'

'You were always an angel of goodness, Nell,' he murmured in a broken voice; 'and I have been worse than a brute to have caused you so much sorrow.'

Then he dashed hastily away, to hide the unmanly tears which would come into his eyes.

The two girls returned to the house.

‘ Ah !’ said Eleanor to her companion ; ‘ he has been led astray, poor boy ! But with all his faults he has a heart of gold.’

Brown reached barracks in time. The soldiers were quartered in low, one-storied, thatched houses, and in the dead of the night he slipped out of the window of his room, which opened upon a long veranda. Without difficulty he made his way into the public road, where, a few yards further on, under the dense shade of an ancient tree, he met three Asiatics, one of whom was a tall man, one a young woman, and the third an old hag.

‘ I have come,’ he said, addressing them in their own tongue, which he spoke indifferently—‘ I have come to say I will go with you. I have the necessary money, and will bring the fakir’s papers. Meet me, at this hour and on this spot, the night after next.’

The people to whom he spoke seemed much pleased at this announcement, and showed their joy by broken exclamations and devout utterances.

Brown crept back safely into the barracks without being observed ; but he was too excited to sleep, for he believed, if he could only get away, that he was on the threshold of gaining enormous riches.

‘ By God !’ he said to himself, ‘ if they will not give me leave, I will desert !’

CHAPTER VI.

A LIMB OF THE LAW.

ON the following day Maunders and Burke and other officers were proceeding towards their mess-house at the conclusion of morning parade.

As they walked along, Burke observed, with some little alarm, a gentleman of neat clerical aspect talking to an officer’s servant, who, as they approached the building, seemed to point out Captain Maunders.

‘ Conscience makes cowards of us all.’ Burke’s mind was relieved, however, for the smooth-looking stranger did not appear to want him, so he went on his way rejoicing. The Ensign was always head over ears in debt, and he had feared that this man was an emissary from one of his numerous creditors.

The suspicious-looking stranger advanced towards the group of officers, and, taking off his hat, said politely, 'I believe I am addressing Captain Maunders, of the 200th Regiment?'

'You are, sir,' blurted out the old Captain angrily; 'I have the honour of serving her Majesty in that regiment; but what the devil is it to you?'

'I hope you will excuse my troubling you; but I have come to make some inquiries respecting a man in your company.'

'There never was such a place as this for bother,' grumbled the officer; 'I am only just off parade, and I haven't had my breakfast. Don't talk to me about my company, sir; go to the Sergeant-Major.'

'I have been to him,' answered the stranger, 'and he referred me to you.'

'It's too bad, too bad, really. I say, Burke,' he shouted after the now retreating Ensign, 'come here, will you, and see what all this is about;' and as he ascended the steps of the mess-house he muttered under his grizzly moustache, 'The service is not fit for a gentleman now.'

The devil-may-care Irishman came forward, preparing himself for something disagreeable, for his intuitive mother-wit at once suspected the man of being a member of the legal profession, and, having only that morning received a solicitor's threatening letter, he felt out of humour with all the limbs of the law.

The gentleman bowed courteously.

'I have come to make some inquiries about a young man in your regiment. I have been informed that he is in Captain Maunders' company. I have further ascertained that he is one of four men of that company who were up in the orderly-room yesterday. Will you allow me to introduce myself? I am Mr. James Sims, of the firm of Sims and Robertson, of Calcutta;' and he handed him his card.

Burke turned slightly pale. He guessed at once it was Brown who was required, and he remembered he had promised Florence Rawley to assist that man by every means in his power. What was he to do? He reflected that the best means of gaining time to get Brown out of the way would be to invite this oily-tongued gentleman to take some refresh-

ment, which he accordingly did, and, after a little pressing, Mr. Sims consented.

As they entered the mess-house Burke saw his soldier-servant (who was an Irishman like himself) near the door, and said privately to him: 'Go to the barracks, and tell Henry Brown, of my company, to make tracks. This old fellow is a bailiff who has come to arrest him. See that he leaves at once. I have reasons of my own for wishing to keep him out of quod. Now mind, get him out of barracks sharp.' The servant saluted and left, and Burke, who had often before trusted him with delicate negotiations, knew that his instructions would be faithfully carried out.

A substantial breakfast was soon placed before the Ensign and Mr. Sims. Burke choked down a morsel or two, but drank several glasses of claret; while Mr. Sims was sparing of the wine, but did ample justice to the good fare on the table.

'Can you tell me, Mr. Burke,' inquired Mr. Sims deferentially, 'if there is a tall, handsome, dark man, of about twenty-five years of age, in your company?'

'Yes,' answered the Ensign, 'we have plenty of good-looking young soldiers in the regiment. We have not long had a batch of recruits. But come to the barracks, and see if you can find the one you want, although I must say your description is rather a vague one.'

'It is a case requiring very delicate management,' the lawyer answered in his sleek way. 'We believe this young man possesses information most valuable to our firm.'

Breakfast ended, they set out for the barracks, and on the way Burke endeavoured to talk to the lawyer in an unconcerned manner.

When they arrived, Mr. Sims shook hands with the Ensign, and thanked him for his hospitality. 'Pray afford me the opportunity of returning your kindness, should you come to Calcutta,' he said; and, with a bland smile upon his countenance, with just a suspicion of triumph about it, Mr. Sims entered the soldiers' quarters.

As the lawyer disappeared, Burke stumbled across his servant, who was returning after having fulfilled his commission. Some jocular remarks passed between them, and the Milesian's countenance gleamed with intelligence and sly humour, as he turned back into the barracks, speedily overtaking Mr. Sims, to whom he at once addressed himself.

‘And who wud your honour wish to see?’ he asked, with the greatest deference, of the unsuspecting attorney. ‘Will I help you, sorr?’

‘I want to see a man called Brown.’

‘Be jabbers! and is it Brown you mane? Shure, and it’s meself that knows the same entoirely. Thady! Thady!’ he shouted, and a tall, gaunt-looking old soldier, with marked features and a repulsive air, came up to them. ‘Thaddeus Brown, yer honer, at yer service,’ said Mike, introducing the new-comer. ‘This gintleman is come specially for you, Thady.’

Thaddeus Brown looked at the lawyer with anything but an amiable glance:

‘And what wud yes be afther wanting wid me, sorr?’ he asked.

‘Oh!’ said the lawyer politely, seeing that there was some mistake, ‘you are not the man I am looking for. I am sorry to have disturbed you;’ and he whispered into the ear of his treacherous guide: ‘A tall, good-looking young fellow, the one who was up before the Colonel in the orderly-room yesterday—you know’

‘Arrah!’ answered Mike. ‘It’s meself knows now who ye mane. Wait till I bring him in frunt of yer honer.’

They walked down the long barrack-room, and stopped opposite a tall youth who was seated on his bed.

‘Shure now, arn’t yes the very bhoy who was up before the Kurnel yesterday, for being absint from tattoo roll-call on the noight of the 21st, and not returning till the noight of the 23rd?’ he asked of the wretched-looking rustic, whose hair was perceptibly shorter, but who looked more than ever miserable and depressed.

‘No. 2,465, Private William Biggs,’ appeared the picture of alarm and terror. He glanced in evident fright at the attorney.

‘Well! and if oi be?’ he stammered at last.

‘This gintleman wud be afther spaking to ye,’ said Miles.

If Mr. Sims had been asked, he could not have described Biggs as ‘handsome.’ Certainly he was young, tall, and dark. ‘This must be the man,’ he thought, ‘and he is putting on that bucolic manner for a purpose.’ Then, turning to the still trembling yokel, he said:

'You have some written papers in your possession, have you not?'

'Whoy, yes, zur, oi have,' answered the youth, 'but——'

'They are of no value to you, are they?' interrupted the lawyer, in an insinuating manner.'

'That depends,' answered the lad.

'Well! I will ask no questions, but simply say I am authorized to give a good price for those documents. Will you let me have them?'

'Well, zur,' drawled the private, 'it's like this—oi doan't know as oi wants to zell 'em—but if oi bes obliged to, whoy in coorse.'

The lawyer was delighted at the facility with which he had attained his purpose.

'We will make short work of it,' he said. 'What do you want for them?'

'Oi leave it to you, zur,' said the other.

'No, my man,' said the lawyer. 'Name your price. I will pay anything in reason.'

The lad, unbuttoning the breast of his close-fitting tunic, produced from thence three or four crumpled, dirty-looking letters, tied up with a piece of twine.

'Here they be, zur,' he said. 'Poor mother! her little thought oi'd have to sell her letters; and he held out the packet to the bewildered lawyer.

'Come, Brown,' he said sternly, dropping his suave manner; 'you have played this comedy long enough. You know what I want, and what I intend to have. I have tried fair means—if you still refuse, I will call in the police.'

The lad dropped the letters.

'Be the gentleman mad or drunk?' he said. 'Oi ain't Brown, and oi ain't afeerd of no perlice.'

'You say you are not Brown?' said Mr. Sims. 'Pray, may I ask what is your name?'

'Whoy, moi name be Will Biggs, and oi be Zumerzet. Moi comrades here knaw who oi be; ef you don't believe me, ask 'em.'

'It's the wrong man again,' said the baffled attorney, and turning angrily to the grinning Mike, he continued, 'Why did you tell me his name was Brown?'

'Ochone! hear to that now! Shure I never tould yer honer his name was Brown.'

'Then,' said the lawyer, in despair, 'is there a Henry Brown belonging to Captain Maunders' company here?'

'Shure, sorr,' answered Mike, 'it's meself would scorn to desave ye. There's no private of that name here; but if yer honer wud jist go to that barrack yonder,' pointing to a distant building, 'I belave the very man ye want is in Captain Talbot's company. Shure, and yer honer must have got the wrong name entoirely; it wasn't Captain Maunders' company at all, at all. Good-day to yer honer.'

The misguided Sims fell into the trap. He found several Browns in the building to which he went. Browns old and young, Browns short and tall—Samuels, Jeremiahs, Johns—and others. But in consequence of asking an irascible Brown if he had been up before the Colonel the previous day, for committing the military crime of absence from tattoo roll-call, he was ejected from the barrack-room, with considerably more force than politeness, followed by a shower of caps and boots, and a volley of opprobrious epithets, and further threatened with vague horrors if he dared to show his ugly face there again.

'You'll see what you'll get the next time,' shouted an outraged Welshman—Taffy Brown.

The lawyer sneaked away crestfallen, but thankful that he had escaped with a whole skin. The scandal of the *fracas*, of course, reached the officers' mess. But the younger men especially had little professional sympathy for the attorney—and the verdict, after dinner, was 'Serve him right.'

That night, as Burke reached his quarters after mess, he saw a soldier with a book, standing at the door of the house. 'Hang it,' he thought, 'old Rawley again. Orders for to-morrow's parade—horrid bore. I wish Maunders would do his own work, especially now Pevensy is away on leave. What a lazy beggar he is!'

He entered the house, followed by the man, and after procuring a light, perceived that the bearer of the book was Henry Brown.

'Well! Brown,' he said, 'you had better get away on leave at once. There is a sneaking attorney prying about after you. If you get off to-morrow, I will make it all square with Captain Maunders and the Colonel. What the devil have you been doing, though? You have always borne a good character in the regiment.'

'I have done nothing that I am ashamed of, sir,' answered Brown. 'Let me thank you for your kind interference, the second time in my life—an unfortunate and miserable one hitherto.'

'Well! for heaven's sake get your leave and go, or you will find yourself in a serious scrape, and, what is more, disgrace the regiment.'

'I will leave to-morrow, on a fortnight's furlough, sir,' he answered respectfully. 'And again accept my grateful thanks for the services you have rendered me.'

'I hope you will soon be gazetted,' said Burke, with his usual good-nature and courtesy, 'for I hear you are expecting to get a commission.'

CHAPTER VII.

A SOLDIERS' BALL.

ENSIGN BURKE, mounted on his diminutive 'tat,' galloped, in a cloud of dust, up to the door of the house which he shared in common with three other junior officers. While dismounting, he was greatly surprised to see a tall, burly figure, dressed in white, standing in the veranda of the habitation.

'Why, Carew! can it possibly be you?' he cried, as he recognised the stranger.

'Yes, and I trust to your hospitality to put me up for a day or two.'

'All right, my dear fellow, I am glad to see you. I am awfully busy just now, helping to get up our men's ball; but come over to the mess-house and have something to eat, and then you can tell me how you have been getting on.'

They proceeded together to the comfortable dining-room of the mess-house, and after they had satisfied their hunger, and lighted their cheroots, seated themselves in the cool veranda for a little quiet conversation.

'Do you remember that pretty little girl we met at Dublin with whom you were so taken, Carew? She is here.'

'Oh! you don't say so,' answered the new arrival with surprise. 'Then I shall not have to go to Mooltan to look for her. How I long to see her lovely, unsophisticated

countenance again. The mind of that innocent girl—unlike all other women I have ever met—was like a blank page. On her untainted soul I mean to inscribe abstract ideas of the useful, the beautiful and the sublime.’

Burke laughed.

‘You met her three years ago ; the blank page may have had a trifle written on it since then.’

‘Impossible ! Such an ideal, transcendental nature would throw off all false conventionalities like—like——’

‘Like water on a duck’s back,’ interposed the Irishman. ‘Only I don’t know what you are aiming at. But, I tell you, you had better look out, for Louisa is uncommonly fetching.’

Carew, who was a stout, florid-faced young Englishman, mopped his face, and gasped with heat and indignation.

‘*Louisa ? Fetching !* What frivolous and impertinent terms to apply to that angelic being !’

He looked at the handsome Ensign with a vague fear that it was possible the irrepressible Irishman had been poaching upon his preserves.

The quick-witted Burke saw what was passing in Carew’s mind.

‘Oh ! you need not be afraid of me,’ he said. ‘The lovely Louisa wouldn’t look at a poor devil of an ensign ; besides, I am in love with the sweetest little girl—— Come to the ball to-night, Carew, and I will reintroduce you to Miss Page. There will be some other girls there too. By Jove ! as pretty as any you ever saw in your life. There is no end of fun going on here. We are getting up regimental theatricals, soldiers’ games, dances, balls, picnics, all sorts of things. The 30th Hussars have just gone, and the 20th Lancers come in their place. Such jolly fellows.’

That night in January, the room usually used for the sergeants’ mess was profusely decorated with boughs of trees, evergreens, flags, and, above all, artistically arranged devices formed of bayonets. The officers of the 200th not only came themselves, and brought their wives in some cases, but had contributed to the expenses, and had sent wine and other things for the supper. The soldiers’ wives and daughters made their appearance in the nearest approach to ladies’ evening dress of which their means would admit.

Burke, always active when any social amusement was in

question, was particularly so when the men of his regiment were concerned. He had been most energetic in decorating the room, and providing for the comfort of the expected guests, and had also induced Miss Page and her father to honour the entertainment with their presence. It had taken a great deal of persuasive eloquence before the fair Louisa would promise to attend. She told Burke that 'soldiers' balls were always horridly slow,' to which the gallant Ensign replied, 'It could not be slow if she were there.' Burke had told her, as a capital joke, how he circumvented the lawyer fellow, and she easily wormed from him all the latest news about the murder, which was not much, and then, finding that Brown had actually got leave and would be away, she consented to appear at the soldiers' ball, in which Burke was so much interested.

At the entrance hall of the sergeants' mess-room, soldiers in uniform stood about, and a party of officers who had come to welcome such members of their families or friends as had accepted their invitations to the ball. The very first arrivals amongst the ladies of the regiment were Miss Rawley and Miss Wake, chaperoned by Mrs. Coote, wife of the paymaster of the Regiment; but it was not until the dancing was in full swing that the late and fashionable Miss Page put in an appearance. She was soon waltzing with Ensign Burke in an airy manner, bewitching to contemplate.

The stout and elderly Captain Maunders was grumbling at the horrid bore of having to come out after dinner, the heat, and the cross-grained nature of regimental life in general, when his discontented reflections were broken by a tall young soldier, who came up to him and stood at attention.

'If you please, sir,' said the man, 'I am afraid I am rather presuming, but I've come to inquire whether I may venture to invite Miss Page to dance.' He added, with a slight sneer, 'She has condescended to come here to-night, and she may still more condescend to dance with me.'

'Bless my soul!' said the Captain. There was something in Brown's tone which jarred upon him. 'You are one of the hosts on this occasion, Brown, and I see no reason why you should not seek an introduction to Miss Page. I will go and ask her permission.'

'Thank you, sir,' replied Brown.

So the portly Maunders crossed over to Miss Page, not, however, without thinking that the manner of the man was 'd—— cheeky' Brown followed him, and was quite close when the Captain, addressing the lady, said :

'Will you allow me to introduce Mr. Brown to you, Miss Page?'

Burke had just brought up her former acquaintance, Carew, to her, and she was talking most graciously to him. She started with surprise and evident annoyance, when the Captain spoke to her; but, with the innate horror of making a scene, and a woman's ready power of disguising her feelings, answered with self-control and presence of mind :

'Oh ! I shall be delighted.'

Brown, looking quite unconcerned, kept his eyes on the ground, and they started together in a waltz.

'How dared you,' hissed Louisa in a cautious whisper into her partner's ear, 'ask me to dance? You will make me conspicuous. You must be mad.'

He answered laughingly : 'I dare say I am.'

'Why did you not go, now that you have got leave?'

'I have stayed just to have this one dance with you,' he answered. 'I may never get such a chance again.'

'What folly ! But it is of a piece with all the rest of your idiocy.'

'Yes, I know. I am an idiot, a fool, and a madman ; but you have made me so.'

'Nonsense,' she said crossly ; 'I have tried to put some sense into your head, but your foolishness is incurable.'

'It is the last time, probably, you will have to put up with me,' he said with a gay glance. 'I leave this place to-night ; perhaps we may never meet again.'

'I hope not,' she answered cynically.

Brown danced exceedingly well, and Louisa's tall figure, showy dress, and altogether remarkable appearance, was not likely to pass unnoticed in that small assembly.

Amongst the spectators stood Captain Whitby, and on his arm leaned Eleanor Wake.

'Good God !' cried he to his companion. 'As I live, there is that fellow Brown, who shot the fakir !'

The tall fair girl turned very pale.

'Don't take any notice of him here,' she said entreatingly. 'Come into the veranda, where we shall be less observed,

and I will tell you why I do not wish you to expose Henry Brown.'

The intimacy between Whitby and Miss Wake had grown in a few weeks rapidly. He had never cared for any other woman, and was now wholly devoted to her. His ideal of feminine character was high and pure, and what he had seen of Eleanor had heightened the first impression he had formed of her, while she, on her side, seemed to find his society all that was agreeable.

'You see, Miss Wake,' said Whitby vehemently, as soon as they were alone, 'that to murder a human being is horrible in any country; but here, in India, where we are in the minority, it is worse than a crime—it is a blunder. That we are here at all is a miracle, our superiority is a moral one; we are a law-abiding people, superior to the former rulers of this nations, who were lawless assassins. You do not know this country. You cannot understand the odium and ill-feeling which will arise from the mad violence of that worthless youth.'

'I admit that it is very dreadful,' answered Eleanor, her voice quivering with emotion; 'but it was in self-defence. That fanatic first attacked Brown.'

'I cannot see what took him into that temple,' said Whitby. 'His presence there, alone, would be resented as an outrage on the native religion.'

'That fakir was a monster of wickedness,' Eleanor retorted. 'This is how it all happened: Brown is a good shot, and has been allowed by his officers occasionally to go out shooting; wild deer, as you know, are common about this place. Returning late at night from one of these excursions, he saw that horrible mendicant with an infant in his arms, followed by a woman, who was weeping, and evidently most anxious to recover possession of the child. But the hard-hearted wretch continued on his way, indifferent to her entreaties. He walked on until he reached a deep pool, and then dashed the poor little creature into the water. The wretched woman, the mother of the little one, rushed to the edge of the lake, uttering heart-breaking cries. Brown threw down his gun, plunged into the tank, and rescued the infant, which he restored to the woman. Her delight seemed unbounded; and, clasping the child in her arms, she fled rapidly away. Brown afterwards discovered that this woman

belonged to a respectable Hindoo family, who, believing that horrid dwarf to be a holy, saintly man, had married her to him when she was quite a child. She had had three children, whom this wretch had killed because they were girls ! It is said that female infanticide was part of this fakir's creed ; added to this, he treated the unhappy woman barbarously, beating and otherwise ill-using her. One of her relations, a hunter, called Gopal, had found out how much she was to be pitied, but he had a superstitious dread of interfering with the fakir himself. Finding, however, that Brown had befriended the fakir's wife, he employed him to deliver her from the temple, where her husband kept her imprisoned. As I said before, Brown was a sportsman, and he had formed acquaintance with Gopal while out of Meerut shooting. When Brown made the attempt to rescue the poor woman, it was believed that the fakir was away at some distance ; but before they could get out of the temple he returned unexpectedly and discovered them. He rushed frantically at Brown, and would certainly have killed him with his dagger, had he not defended himself.'

'This certainly places Brown's conduct in a better light,' said Whitby; 'but still I think the matter ought to be judicially investigated, especially as some valuable documents have disappeared, which your friend Brown is supposed to have stolen.'

'Oh no !' cried Eleanor warmly. 'He is rash, daring, and very incautious ; but he is not a thief.'

'Where are these papers, then ?'

'The fakir's wife and her relation Gopal have them.'

'Then Brown should come forward and clear himself.'

'Perhaps he may,' answered Eleanor ; 'but it has all happened at such an awkward time. He is a gentleman by birth, and hopes shortly to obtain a commission. I do not think he has acted dishonourably, if the truth were known ; but it is impossible to say of what people may accuse him if he is tried.'

'He is certainly in a very awkward position,' agreed Whitby.

'He was very wild and foolish in England,' continued Eleanor. 'His relations, with great difficulty, have now tried to give him a fresh start. It would be such a pity to blast his life now, when in a new country it is possible he may turn over a new leaf.'

'But why do you take such an interest in this young man?' asked Whitby, in a somewhat jealous manner.

'I knew him in England,' she replied gently; 'and his friends are very dear to me. I hope to be able soon to explain to you the tie which exists between us.'

'You do not love this man? You are not engaged to him?' asked Whitby in an agitated manner.

She blushed as she answered:

'Oh dear no! He can never be more to me than he is at present.'

'Then I would sooner know my fate now, Miss Wake. You must have seen that my attentions to you have been more than those of an ordinary acquaintance. For some time you have seen me at your side as often as I dared. The longer I have known you, the more I have learned to appreciate you. I cannot resist saying to-night something which has long been in my heart, and often very nearly on my lips. You must understand what I mean. I love you, Eleanor. Do you care to return my love?'

During this address Eleanor's face had first turned deadly pale, then flushed a rosy red; but she did not speak.

'You cannot love me, then,' he said; 'you do not think me worthy of you.'

'Oh! Captain Whitby,' she answered in a hardly audible voice. 'Not worthy? I think you are a great deal too good for me.'

'Then I may at least hope?' he continued.

'Yes,' she said shyly.

'You have made me happier than I can describe, dear Eleanor,' he said, bending over her white hand and kissing it.

'Let us return,' she whispered; 'our absence will be noticed.'

In the new flood of happiness which had entered Whitby's life, he had forgotten the very existence of Brown and his crimes; or, if he remembered him at all, it was with gratitude as the means which had brought about this explanation with the woman he sincerely loved. When the engaged lovers re-entered the ball-room, Eleanor noticed that Brown was no longer to be seen amongst the dancers. They heard from Burke that Miss Page had left in a bad temper, saying she was 'bored and tired.'

It was not altogether a successful evening for Burke, who had had a misunderstanding with Florence Rawley. The fact was he had omitted to ask her to dance until towards the end of the evening, when she stiffly refused, feeling herself slighted. The last of his misfortunes was that Carew, after they had returned home from the ball, would stop talking to him until a late hour; the Ensign, who was somewhat ruffled, and altogether tired out, would gladly have gone to bed.

Carew favoured him with these reflections :

'You see, Burke, I am what most people would call fastidious ; and the style of the greater number of the girls whom I encounter in society does not please me. You know my habits : if I want a boat, I have one made expressly for myself, according to my own views of boat-building ; if I want a new piece of furniture for my rooms, I have it constructed according to my own ideas. Now (so it seems to me), with regard to a wife, before I made any girl the partner of my life, I should like to be sure that her tastes really harmonize with mine. In fact, I should like to educate her for the position.'

'An excellent notion,' assented Burke ; 'but more feasible in theory than practice.'

'Possibly. Any theory which one devises may turn out in practice a success or a failure ; one can but do one's best to work it out. I have formed my theory, or rather I have determined to experimentalize on an old theory, and I will at all events see what I can do with it. You were alluding to my having been "taken" with Miss Page when I met her in Dublin. It seems to me that she has just the sort of impressionable and confiding soul which might be rendered amenable in my process ; and I entertained this idea even when I saw her before.'

'Yes,' said Burke sleepily ; 'I have no doubt you will elevate her moral tone—and she will teach you a thing or two.'

CHAPTER VIII.

TREASURE TROVE.

BROWN, still dressed in his uniform, had left the brilliantly-lighted ball-room. The music of the valse was still ringing in his ears, and his mind was filled with the remembrance

of his wild dance with Louisa Page. He found himself on the level plain of the parade-ground, bathed in glorious moonlight, and then, with a rapid and decided step, he made his way to a broad highway edged with trees, which was the road to Delhi. At a distance of a mile from Meerut he joined a party of people who were evidently waiting for him. Standing by the side of the road could be seen a bullock-cart drawn by two white oxen, a man holding a diminutive pony, and some other figures loitering about. As Brown approached the group, a tall, erect, soldierly-looking native said :

‘ Sahib, we feared you were not coming.’

‘ Yes ; I am late,’ answered Brown.

He mounted the pony, the driver of the cart started the oxen, and the little procession moved slowly on.

Adventures come to the adventurous ! In the beautiful stillness of the moonlit night Brown, in a vague way, reflected on the strangeness of his position. He was starting with Asiatics, of whom he knew little, to discover a long-hidden treasure, guarded, as his companions thought, by supernatural spells. The occult dangers which were full of terror to them were matters of scorn to Brown. What he feared was whether the treasures themselves were not as mythical as the surroundings with which his companions had invested them.

India is a land of hidden treasure, if only it could be found ! It has been the custom of that country from time immemorial to hide wealth in the earth from ruler, robber, or invader. The great city of Delhi especially has for one thousand years been the scene of civil war, foreign invasion, and religious dispute, and around that ancient city are miles of ruins and semi-deserted country, where much wealth has been hidden in troublous times.

Asiatics think that when an English painter or poet wanders admiringly among their ruins, it is to discover ‘ treasure,’ an occult art, for which they possess a national aptitude. Gopal thought that Brown’s presence alone would be an assistance, besides scaring away demons more powerful than men, who fly cowed before the presence of an Englishman.

In the cart were two women, one young and beautiful, the widow of the fakir, and the other a reputed witch. This

small and wizened old woman had snow-white hair, and her black face was lined all over with wrinkles of extreme fineness. Puny, aged, and feeble as she was, she was the ruling spirit of the party, not only from the fiery energy of her mind, but from the credulity of the Asiatics, who believed that she could foresee the future, control malignant spirits, and influence passing events for good or evil. The tall youth who walked by the side of the cart was Gopal, the hunter, now the lover of Moti, the widow of the fakir. There were besides Brown two more men, one the driver of the bullock-cart, and the other Brown's servant nominally, in reality his general factotum.

This oddly-assorted company of people were starting on a six days' journey. Three days, according to their very slow means of progression, would bring them to the great city of Delhi; but it would take yet another three days' travel across the semi-deserted and ruin-strewed wilderness which surrounds that great capital to enable them to reach Secro, a long-abandoned stronghold, under whose crumbling blocks of granite this fabulous treasure—fabulous possibly in reality, and seemingly incredible in its stated quantity—lay concealed. This treasure, recalling tales of the 'Arabian Nights,' consisted, it was said, of bricks of gold, piled in caverns, bushels of unset gems, and utensils of solid gold and silver. Tradition stated that a hundred and seventy years ago a traitor noble named Ali Kareem—one of those who had invited Nadir Shah to invade India—had caused his immense wealth to be safely secreted under this castle. But Ali Kareem and all his kith and kin had been massacred in the sacking of Delhi.

Somewhat recently a paper had been found among the books and documents belonging to the Newab of Doobghur, giving a description of the exact spot where this enormous wealth was buried. This paper or chart had been confided to the fakir, as it was thought that as a wandering mendicant, with a reputation of extraordinary sanctity, he could take up his abode in a deserted spot without provoking remark or exciting curiosity, and prosecute the search for the treasure on the Newab's behalf. On the death of the fakir, the paper fell into the possession of Gopal, the lover of Moti, the fakir's wife. The young Rajpoot's cupidity had been aroused; still, he dared not undertake the search alone,

and finding Brown willing and anxious to join in the undertaking, and feeling possibly some gratitude towards him for Moti's sake, he took him into partnership, after having shown him the paper and explained its contents.

After travelling all night, at dawn they reached a thick grove of trees, their first encampment, where they proposed to rest during the heat of the day. Fires were quickly lighted, and food prepared before they sought repose.

At this place they fell in with another party of travellers, who made themselves most agreeable to our new-comers, so much so, that when evening came the two companies joined, and started together, as they had to travel on the same road, for they also were going to Delhi. Their new acquaintances were strong, sturdy peasants, and said they were a farmer and his two sons, who owned some land in a village a few miles out of Delhi.

Nothing particular happened the second night, and the two parties encamped together again under a grove of trees; but while the food was preparing for their refreshment, a wild boar suddenly rushed out from a neighbouring thicket. All the men jumped to their feet in alarm, and Brown, seizing his fowling-piece, followed the retreating beast. Some time elapsed before he was able to obtain a shot, but at length, when the animal was making his way across an open piece of ground, he aimed at him, and the brute fell dead. Brown then thought of going back to the encampment to get help to remove the animal, as some of his companions might be glad of its flesh; for many castes in India will eat the meat of a wild pig, although they will refuse other animal food.

It took him several hours to return, and the sun was unpleasantly hot when he again entered the dense black shade of the grove. The embers of the fires were still glowing faintly, but, to his surprise, he could see no trace of his companions. The bullock-cart had also disappeared. He called his servant by name, and he called Gopal, but neither answered; still, he fancied he heard people speaking in whispers at no very great distance. He ran in the direction from whence the sounds came, and was horrified to see the farmer's two sons lifting the slender figure of Moti—seemingly a stiffened corpse—which they were about to place in a newly-dug shallow grave. The ground round had evidently

been lately turned over, and on Brown's approach, the two men dropped their burden and fled. As he examined the lifeless body of the woman, the cause of her death became evident. Round her slender throat was a handkerchief, which in their hurry the murderers had left, and which proved that she had been strangled by Thugs. The ground had been disturbed, and now looked suspiciously like freshly-made graves. Using the spade which the Thugs had left, Brown quickly removed the light, sandy soil, and discovered the stiffened forms and distorted features of Gopal, the bullock-driver, and his own servant; but no trace could he find of the reputed witch.

For a minute or two Brown stood spell-bound in horror and amazement; for some time he felt quite at a loss what to do. He could not return to Meerut, and hardly knew how to continue his journey alone. He paced up and down under the spreading branches of the trees of the grove in great indecision. He searched the corpse of Gopal for the paper of instructions by which the treasure could be found—but it was gone! To gain this document had evidently been the object of the crime perpetrated by the Thugs.

He saw at a little distance his pony, still hobbled, and nibbling the thin grass. His horror being abated, not having tasted food for many hours, he began to feel hungry, therefore he determined to travel along the highroad until he reached the nearest village, debating in his mind whether he should inform the rural police of the murders which had been committed.

After proceeding some miles he perceived the dull dun-coloured walls, formed of baked clay, which surrounded a small townlet. On reaching this place, the advent of an Englishman riding a horse was a sufficiently surprising event for the population (consisting mostly of old women and children, and a number of dogs, for the men were at work in the surrounding fields) to turn out to look at him. An official was discovered who spoke a few words of English, and with some difficulty Brown obtained food, and he then secured his pony, and, with his gun by his side, threw himself under the shade of a wall and fell asleep.

After some hours he awoke much refreshed, to find that the sun was sinking, and that it would soon be the hour for him to proceed on his road, if he decided to do so. His

clothing, of no very great value, had disappeared with the cart; this seemed to him a very minor evil, as he had retained his gun and his money on his person. After deep reflection, he considered it was wiser for him to say nothing of the Thugs, nor of his own loss, and decided that he would still proceed on the treasure-seeking expedition, and go to Secro alone, trusting to his recollection of the contents of the lost paper to enable him to find the spot.

He rose with this intention, and, proceeding to catch his steed, which was loose, but hobbled, he stumbled against the little old witch whom he had last seen in the bullock-cart with the unfortunate Moti; and as Brown accidentally jostled her, she turned round and hurled a volley of curses and maledictions in an unknown tongue at him. Disregarding her shrill imprecations, Brown seized her by the shoulder, anxious to find out what she knew about the fate of his late companions; but his intention of questioning her was frustrated by a party of villagers, evidently much excited and armed with sticks, who dragged the old woman away from his grasp. The last he saw of her was, that she was taken to what appeared to be either the local police-court, or the hut of the head-man of the village. Brown thought it prudent to leave them to settle their affairs without his assistance, and, mounting his pony, galloped away.

The remainder of the journey was comparatively easy. He rode by night along the broad well-kept roads, and he rested by day in the *dák* bungalows, or Government staging-houses. In the city of Delhi he was able to provide himself with some few necessaries he required, and then proceeded on his way into the country. On the seventh day after leaving Meerut he arrived at the spot where he believed riches beyond the wildest dreams of avarice were to be found.

He had reached his destination. The ruins of the castle of Secro stood before him, rising out of a totally uninhabited plain, covered with the remains of palaces, mosques, and streets, which both time and the hand of man had turned into one confused mass of devastation. Not a sound broke the stillness of the scene. Not a human being or animal was visible. Solitude, destruction, and desolation alone surrounded him on every side. The castle itself had once

been an impregnable stronghold ; but now only one round battlemented tower stood erect, although a huge mound of earth, mixed with great blocks of granite and pieces of wall, showed its enormous extent in former ages. It had become the home of owls, bats, and snakes, and was also the lair of wolves, jackals, and of an occasional leopard.

Brown climbed the grassy slope, and found himself on the summit of the old fortifications ; on nearer inspection he was able to perceive that much of the massive foundations still remained. What had been the court of the castle could still be traced, though long grass, briars, and rubbish choked its once level space. After wandering about for some time he found a low door, which led into the tower, and walking up a narrow stair, he reached the summit, and thence looked over the surrounding country. A fine and extended view lay before him, but he did not feel in the mood to admire the sun sinking rapidly in the west. From the summit of the tower Brown's eyes fell upon a long-disused well in one corner of the court, the discovery of which rejoiced him greatly, for he remembered that the treasure was said to be hidden under a mound forty paces distant from the well, in a westerly direction. He hurried down the turret-stairs, and made his way through rank weeds, and over fallen stones, to the spot. Then he paced forty steps to the west and found himself opposite a heap of rubbish composed principally of large stones, which he set himself to the weary task of removing, one by one. The labour and heat were exhausting, but, nerved by hope and excitement, Brown seemed to have supernatural strength. When he had displaced the pile he saw a stone slab, with an iron ring in it. By tying a rope to a tree adjoining, he improvised a pulley and succeeded in raising the heavy weight. He then saw a narrow stair of cut stone which seemed to lead underground, and far below he could perceive a glimmering star-like light. He walked down a hundred steps, carefully counting them as he went, and arrived at a gloomy hall, in the centre of which was a tank, or bath.

These subterranean baths and underground chambers are common in all the abodes of wealthy Asiatics, and in these places they find a cool retreat from the heat of summer.

Brown wandered through long galleries and deserted rooms, a perfect labyrinth of chambers of cut stone, the light coming

in through the great walls, ten feet thick, from slits which looked like loop-holes for shooting arrows. In this subterranean world there might be treasure hidden—untold wealth—but to find it was the difficulty.

Brown returned utterly disheartened to his room at the staging-house, a small cottage on the Kurnaul road. For three days he returned daily to Secro, wandering about, and scanning every nook and cranny of the ancient heavy masonry, measuring the vaulted rooms, and tapping the massive walls for some hollow space. They all seemed to give back a deep, dull, mysterious sound. These rooms were inhabited by bats, and every now and then a snake he had disturbed would glide past him, which he killed, unless it managed, and it generally did, to creep silently away and disappear in the darkness. On one occasion as Henry Brown entered a dark vault he saw two eyes, like flames, peering at him through the gloom; then a dark object dashed with marvellous rapidity past him. He found he had disturbed the lair of a leopardess, and that she had left two cubs behind her.

Day after day passed; still he persevered, as he felt persuaded that here was hidden a mine of wealth which would render the remainder of his days peaceful and happy in his own land, and place him for ever above want—if he could only discover it.

His leave would soon expire, and he feared that he had failed. But the day before he was bound to return, he noticed in one of the crumbling walls a large hole which he had not before observed. The cavity was barely big enough for him to enter; however, getting through the opening with difficulty, he drew in his gun after him. The room he now entered was dark and low, and seemed crowded with packages, which appeared to him to resemble great leather-covered camel-trunks. The place had a peculiar aromatic odour, and, as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, he discovered that he was in a chamber with a groined roof, and that there was a lamp on the floor. A heap of silver and gold coins lay in one corner of the apartment, while in another a mass of dazzling stones glittered fitfully. Also, piled up to the roof, with what seemed order and precision, were nuggets or bricks of solid gold. Brown felt as if he were a living actor in a scene from the 'Arabian Nights.'

Here were countless treasures, money which would transform him into a millionaire. However, all at once he perceived a man seated on the ground, who rose and confronted him. This figure appeared so suddenly, Brown could hardly tell in his first surprise whether it was mortal or fiend, but, as he approached, he saw that the man had a hideous, flat, black face, long dark hair, and his rascally countenance was surmounted by a heavy red turban. His ragged and torn dress was that of a peasant, and Brown soon recognised him as one of his former travelling companions. The Thug made one step towards the Englishman, and threw down the light which he had taken in his hand on Brown's entrance. Brown fired at him, and the man, without sigh or groan, dropped dead, shot through the heart.

Brown, with a match from his pocket, re-lit the lamp, and began to examine his prostrate enemy. His glazed, hideous eyes were open, his long hair lay on the floor, his ragged turban had fallen from his head, and from his dead hand had dropped a piece of glass or crystal which glittered fitfully, and which was in size about as large as a pigeon's egg. Brown thought it might be an uncut diamond, and replacing it in an antique brass box, which seemed to be its case, he appropriated it. Taking the red turban from the fallen Thug, he collected as many gold pieces and nuggets as he could carry. He also took a small casket the thief had selected, full of antique jewellery. He loaded himself with large gold pieces of the purest gold, of the rarest workmanship; for they were gold Mohurs of the time of Ackbar. He tied most of the spoil up carefully in the Thug's red turban.

He then left, closing the hole by which he had entered as securely as he could with the stones which had been removed by the secret thief, and he also carefully put away all trace of his handiwork. It was now late, and quite dark within the low black arches. He hurried through the great vaulted rooms, which echoed his solitary steps; but, though he had realized his darling wish, it brought him not so much happiness as he anticipated, and no thrill of delight to his heart. As he hastened up the narrow flight of stone stairs, a hideous face seemed to be trying to blow out his lamp. Brown reached the outer air: the stars above shone clear and bright; the cold night wind blew fresh and keen;

the wild cry of the jackals filled the air. He reached his humble abode, and carefully hid all signs of his booty from the servants of the bungalow, and then, utterly worn out, he threw himself on his bed and slept.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAGES OF SUCCESS.

AT dawn Brown made his preparation for his return journey, and as soon as the sun had risen, he seated himself in a bullock-cart which he had hired from a peasant. He sold his pony for a few rupees, and determined, as soon as he reached Delhi, to post to Meerut from that place, which he could do in one night. He was in a fever of impatience to reach his regiment, to see Louisa Page and Eleanor Wake, to hear if his commission had been signed; and yet there he was, condemned to travel at the agonizingly slow rate of two miles an hour. He himself could have walked more quickly than the patient beasts who drew his equipage, but he did not dare to leave his newly-found treasures unguarded.

Neither was his mind altogether free from such fear as his daring spirit was capable of feeling. In this wild and semi-deserted country, the few inhabitants belonged mostly to the robber tribe of Goojurs. Besides, it was probable that he would be traced by some of the Thug organization, to whom he must now be an object of hatred and fear, as he had not only killed one of their number, but had discovered the secret of the hidden treasure of Secro, which they had desired to acquire for themselves.

At sunset he reached a now ruinous but once large and magnificent serai, which, in the old days when Delhi was the capital of the Mogul Empire, had been always crowded with men, horses, camels, and elephants, because it was the chief resting-place of all those travellers from the north who once thronged the great Mahomedan city. But now the serai was in parts only a few degrees less dilapidated than Secro itself.

However, through a nobly-proportioned Moorish arch, Brown entered a large paved court, on the four sides of which ran an arched, cloister-like corridor. This communi-

cated with a number of small apartments which opened on to it, custom giving one room to each stranger. The whole of this building was formed of elaborately-carved red granite; but here and there the roof had fallen in, and the stately arches of the corridor had given way.

Brown found, to his surprise, that the ruined building was evidently crowded with travellers. Carts, tethered horses, even camels, with numerous attendants and servants, occupied the spacious court, and fires had been lighted in every direction. What added to Brown's astonishment was that he was informed that most of these people were the servants of European travellers.

He made his way to the side of the building which was in the least ruinous condition, and discovered a square cell, with a mud floor, which had the merit of being fairly dry and clean. He took possession of this as his private apartment. Then he succeeded in getting some cooked food from an old Mahomedan, who attended to the wants of travellers. After his meal he retired into his room, partly to rest, and partly to protect his property. The apartment had no windows, and obtained its light from the door which opened upon the corridor. He perceived two men walking up and down before his open door, and saw that they were dressed in a mixture of European and Asiatic costumes. Asiatic, in as far as they wore fur-lined Afghan overcoats; but their bare heads, European boots, and general appearance, proclaimed their Western origin. Brown, in his room, was concealed from view by the darkness of the place, but he could see and hear without being seen. As the strangers passed and repassed his door in animated conversation, he discovered that they were conversing in French, with which tongue he was fairly familiar. He could only hear disjointed scraps of their conversation, but it seemed, from what they said, that they were waiting in this serai until they received permission from the King of Delhi to enter his city.

The precaution of these foreigners seemed very singular to Brown, for, Delhi being under British rule, anyone was free to enter it. He further discovered from their talk that they were Russians, that there were eight of them altogether, and that they had been promised an audience by the great Padshah himself. Also he gathered that they were ambassadors, who had brought a treaty from some distant

potentate. After a while the strangers retired, and Brown saw them no more. He thought but little of the incident at the time, his own affairs occupied so much of his thoughts, but after-events proved to him that there might have been more significance in this secret mission than he had imagined.

That night Brown carefully closed his door, and laid himself down in front of it; but no adventure befell him. He rose at daybreak, and reached Delhi the same night. The next day found him back in the barracks at Meerut. He had been away only a fortnight, but what an eventful time! He had left Meerut a poor man, and a suspected criminal; he had returned wealthy, to find that he was a commissioned officer, posted to a regiment in the Punjaub. As he had received official intimation of his promotion, he left the barracks, and took rooms in an hotel, where he proposed staying until he had made his preparations to join his new regiment.

When night came he hurried to announce the marvellous change which had befallen him to Louisa Page—to impart the joyful news to the woman he loved. He thought it advisable to visit her in the same clandestine manner which he had been in the habit of doing. Therefore, he climbed the low wall round her bungalow, walked through the grounds, and arrived at her bedroom window, and knocked at the closed shutters. They were opened by a female attendant, who told him the young lady was in the drawing-room talking to a gentleman.

This information was anything but pleasing to Brown, and, feeling very much disturbed and irritated, he walked round to the front of the bungalow. The shutters of the three large drawing-room windows were open, and a flood of light illumined the bushes in the garden. He approached one of the windows quietly, and the first thing which met his eyes did not tend to improve the condition of his mind. A tall, stout, florid young man, whose portly person was encased in evening dress, was bending over the fair hand of the ‘unlimited’ one, and kissing it with an expression of rapt devotion. The young man had round blue eyes, his golden hair curled all over his head, while the fulness of his face, and the rosiness of his round cheeks, suggested the appearance of an overgrown Cupid.

Brown had very little compunction in playing the eaves-

dropper; he crept up close to the window in a fury of smothered indignation and jealousy, wondering who 'the fat fool was.'

'Yes, Miss Page,' he heard him say; 'it is nearly four years since your evanescent visit to Dublin. Evanescent, do I say? But it was not so to me. Since then I have not been a free man.'

'Effervescing visit, did you say?' said the imperturbable Loo lightly. She wished to ward off that declaration of love she now felt to be imminent.

'Evanescent,' he said in a thick voice, as if he had plums in his mouth. 'Fleeting—vanishing. All supreme moments of life are transitory.'

'Supreme moments are not in my line, Mr. Carew.'

'But, Miss Page, you inspire them.'

'Not intentionally, I assure you. I have experienced supreme efforts, and they were a great bore.'

'Ah! that is the want of education. I feel that I could imbue you with earnestness if you would give me the right to do so.'

'Certainly not,' laughed the girl. 'Do you wish to say that there is room for improvement in me?'

'Oh no!' said Carew, with the utmost politeness. 'You are faultless and perfect.'

'Flatterer!' said the lady, but smiling in a self-complacent manner.

'Absolutely perfect, as far as Nature's handiwork goes; but requiring education.'

'Education, Mr. Carew? Why, I was "finished" three years ago.'

'You are an angelic being, a perfect mind in an exquisite body.'

'What? Would you educate an angel?' again laughed the girl.

'An angel such as you, who are tied to earth, still needs some sublunary knowledge.'

'But what, under the moon, is it that I do not know? I can dance, ride, play whist, row, sing, and flirt when I have a chance. Certainly, I carefully evaded learning when I was at school; but, as I have picked up the three R's, I think I am educated enough.'

'You are, I repeat, absolutely perfect.'

'I would sooner hear that from *your* lips than from anybody else,' she answered; 'for I value your good opinion so much.'

'Do you really care about my poor opinion?'

'Of course I do,' she answered, in her most insinuating manner.

'Do you care for me enough to join your fate to mine?'

'But oh! you would educate me above my intellect—if I did.'

'No—I would learn from you.'

'“My only books were woman's looks, and folly all they taught me.” Oh! that would never do, Mr. Carew. You! a fellow of Oxford! A professor of chemistry, geometry, and inferential logarithms, and the calculus scribendi! I am rather mixed in my terms, am I not?'

Carew laughed.

'A man does not need learning in a wife; and, if you would share my lot—will you, Miss Page? May I call you Louisa?'

'What?' she said, with pretended *naïveté*. 'You have only known me three weeks; I did not even dream you admired me.'

'Who could fail to do that?' said the infatuated Carew. 'But will you let me hope some time—some future time? I have hurried you. I have been precipitate.'

'Well, to tell you honestly, I wish I *could* say “Yes,” Mr. Carew. But when I was a silly chit of a schoolgirl, I was a fool—a silly fool. I got myself into a terrible mess, and shall suffer for it all my life.'

'But will you not give me the right to protect you? If my time, my devotion, my fortune, my life, are any good to you, I lay them at your feet.'

'You are most kind and generous,' said the girl, with some real feeling. 'What I have done is irrevocable, and I bitterly regret it.'

Tears were in Carew's eyes.

'Then you bid me hope?'

'Yes,' she said softly. 'And I will hope, too.'

Just then Louisa's father, with vacant eyes and dazed look, entered the room and sank into an armchair. His appearance, and the fumes of brandy which he brought with him, proclaimed his condition.

'What men call Providence employs human agents,' he began. 'What was the man on the white horse but a tool of the Inscrutable? Why should I not also be an incense-bearer? When the seven seals are opened, we shall see the upheaval of empires, and then I—I——' and the old man waved his arms over his head.

'Yes, father, of course,' answered Louisa, with some womanly gentleness; and, turning to Carew, she said: 'You had better go. Come another night. It is such a comfort to me to have a friend like you. But go now.'

The burly squire again kissed her hand, and silently withdrew. The old Major sank back into his chair, and Louisa, taking no more notice of him, passed into her own chamber, which adjoined the drawing-room.

Brown, who was still outside, having both seen and heard all that had passed, hastened to her window and struck with some violence on the shutter.

Louisa opened the casement.

'Heavens!' she exclaimed; 'how ill you look!'

There was an expression of dislike and contempt on her countenance, and she greeted him without the slightest cordiality.

'I *am* ill,' he answered sulkily. 'I think I have picked up a fever. What with the sun, the bad water, and that malarious place, I believe I am dying; and,' he added, with a bitter smile, 'you will be glad to hear it.'

'But you have failed,' she said. 'I never thought there was anything in it.'

'You are wrong. I have succeeded. The treasure is simply countless. I could carry away no more than I have brought you. Here, take it. The diamond is worth, I should think, six thousand pounds—it is badly cut, but the colour is very fine—and look at the gold things I have got!'

He threw the gold pieces and nuggets in a mass on the table.

'Do you consider you have obtained these things honestly?' asked she, looking at the treasures with amazement.

'I consider we have as good right to them as anyone else, as I found them.'

'Good Heavens! the thing is covered with blood!' exclaimed Louisa, as she threw down the diamond, which seemed to glimmer with a weird, unearthly light.

Brown carelessly wiped the gem with his handkerchief.

‘Have you murdered anyone to get it?’

‘No,’ he answered, rather bitterly; ‘but I killed a man who would have killed me. That is justifiable in self-defence, is it not?’

‘Oh! that’s your old argument;’ and she looked at the strange collection of wealth with a perplexed air.

‘I am tired and jaded to death. Put these things away carefully now, and I will come back in a few days. I have obtained my commission, and we shall have to go to the Punjaub. I must dispose of these things if I can, and go and collect more, and then we will cut the army and return home. Thank Heaven! I shall be glad to leave this accursed place, people, and regiment. Now listen to me, Loo. You drop that new fellow I saw to-night, whoever he may be. If you don’t, it will be the worse for both of you, for I will stand no nonsense.’

And without waiting for her answer, he left.

It was Brown’s intention to proceed at once to Eleanor Wake; but he felt so prostrate in mind and body that he was unequal to the exertion.

That night a splitting headache, agonizing pains in all his limbs, with alternate fever and ague fits, told Brown that he was suffering for encroaching on the domain of the Goojurs, and meddling with the treasure of ancient kings. He had a violent attack of jungle fever; moreover, his mind was affected, the doctor asserted, as at all hours, day and night, he saw the figure of the Thug standing by him, or come gliding in and out of the room, turning its hideous countenance towards him. The medical men termed this an hallucination; but it appeared real enough to Brown, and it never left him.

He lay ill at his hotel. There was much sickness in the cantonment of Meerut—the scourge of cholera had appeared. The rain, which fell in torrents, cooled the air; but over the place hung a hot, fœtid, depressing atmosphere. Every evening, across the sandy plain, the wailing of the band, as it played the ‘Dead March’ in *Saul*, was not enlivening.

However, in time, Brown became convalescent; but his health was much shattered, and his mind seemed wrecked; while the long, hot, restless days, followed by sleepless nights, weakened his nerves. As he was getting better, on

one occasion he saw from his window Louisa Page riding and conversing with Carew. At another time this might have passed without notice, because his love was no passion; but then it vexed and annoyed him beyond endurance. He looked upon it as a proof that she heeded neither his wishes nor his words.

In the long sleepless nights, as he paced up and down the veranda of the hotel, this and much else preyed upon his mind—his useless, ruined life, his disgrace, his solitude.

‘Was I any party to the bargain,’ he asked, ‘when the curse of existence was put upon me? No one loves me. Even *she* neglects and despises me. If I live, I have nothing I can enjoy, nothing which can give me pleasure. I hate to see the sun rise and set day after day, and to know it can bring no alleviation to my misery.’

‘Why not kill yourself and end it all?’ a voice seemed to whisper in his ear. ‘One shot with *this*, and all will be over.’

While thus reflecting, he used often to finger his gun and play with it. It was the very weapon which had ended the days of that luckless marauder, and of the fakir.

‘I will shoot myself,’ he said. ‘I will bear this life no longer!’

He pointed the gun towards his mouth, and, putting his finger on the trigger, in one second more the troubles of Brown in this world would have ended; but at that minute Captain Whitby entered the room, seized his arm, and changed the course of the bullet, which entered the ceiling.

‘Are you mad?’ cried Whitby.

‘Yes,’ said Brown; ‘mad with misery and despair. If you had not stopped me, it would now have been all ended.’

‘I believe you must be mad, or you would know that it is the act of a coward to fly from the evils of life—the results of your own misconduct.’

‘But does that make them the easier to bear? It was my own cursed folly. Yes; but that is the sting of the whole thing.’

Then Whitby added rather sternly: ‘Wake, you have now a fresh start in life. You can return to the society of your equals. No one need know of this last silly attempt of yours! Rise to a higher level, and be a better man—if not for your own, for Eleanor’s sake, who loves you truly. You

have been so ill,' continued he, 'that we did not know how to tell you before, but, Eleanor having informed me that you are her brother, I have come now to say that I have been engaged to your sister for some little time, and we are to be married shortly, and we wish you to be present at the ceremony.'

CHAPTER X.

A NEW TERROR.

RICHARD WHITBY was one day riding with his affianced bride, Eleanor Wake, in that picturesque suburb of Meerut which had been the scene of Wake's tragic encounter with the fakir. Fine trees overarched the road, whilst the underwood of the grove was full of agile monkeys gaily jumping from branch to branch. Near at hand was the large pond, with the antique necropolis and Hindoo temples erected on the waterside.

Whitby looked rather disturbed and annoyed, as, pointing to a massively built shrine, he said to Eleanor:

'I am afraid we have not yet heard the end of the business of your brother killing the fakir in that temple. Lawyer Sims is not going to let the matter drop, for evidently his energy and industry are stimulated by the hope of making lacs of rupees. Heaven knows what he has further ferreted out, but he is coming to see me this evening, "having obtained important information."'

'Oh!' cried Eleanor, with swift anxiety, 'you will screen Henry, for my sake? It is true that the men of our family have been spendthrifts and gamblers, and we are now landless and penniless in consequence of their reckless conduct; but still our name has never been dishonoured, and if my brother is found guilty of murder and theft, we can never hold up our heads again. Promise me that you will be guarded in what you say to the lawyer.'

'I will do all I can for him—that is, as far as a man of honour can. Wake's illness at this juncture is particularly ill-starred. If he had only gone away to a distant part of India, in a new regiment, with a new name, and in so different a social position, all trace of his identity with this matter might have been lost; but if he remains here, I fear that Sims may discover that Ensign Wake of the Tipperary

Rangers and Private Brown of the 200th are one and the same man.'

'But you will be cautious. If my brother is tried the disgrace will kill me.'

'I am but a poor diplomatist, dearest,' he answered; 'but I will try to be as secret as the grave, for your dear sake.'

Some hours after, Richard Whitby might have been seen closeted with the indefatigable and formidable attorney, who in this interview did not find the gallant Captain either enthusiastic or communicative. Whitby answered his questions with military brevity, and exhibited a curt reticence almost amounting to discourtesy.

'You see, my dear sir,' said the suave lawyer to Whitby, 'in dealing with Asiatics it is almost impossible to get at the real facts of a case. They are always inveterate liars; but when they come to mix up the supernatural with their falsehoods, no man on earth can unravel their meaning. I am instructed that Henry Brown, of the 200th Regiment, after dancing at a soldiers' ball, still dressed in uniform, started on a journey with an old woman, who bears a bad character and is a reputed witch, and that he was also accompanied by some natives of greater respectability. I am further instructed that by the incantations of this presumed witch several of the travellers have disappeared, and that the English soldier is in some way connected with their mysterious fate; at least, this is what the natives assert. Further, that Brown, still in British uniform, was present at a dacoity in which some valuable jewels and a magic crystal have been stolen, and the family to whom these things rightly belong are most anxious to recover the talisman. I am instructed that the possessor of this wonderful charm cannot be killed while wearing it, and that it confers wealth and prosperity upon whoever obtains it; also that this stone controls evil spirits and demons. But lastly, as if to show the absurdity of these old wives' fables—I am told that the English soldier murdered the native who had the crystal in his possession, thus proving that its magical powers are not what they are represented to be.'

Whitby laughed.

'My dear sir, all this seems an idiot's tale, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing!'

'That is true,' answered the lawyer blandly; 'but the story, wild as it is, is corroborated by these facts: I have evidence to prove that Brown was at the said soldiers' ball; that he did leave Meerut in company with some natives, and, armed with a gun and dressed in uniform, was seen in various villages. Therefore, although there is a great deal that is absurd and fantastic in the native version of the affair, you may be sure it has a substratum of truth.'

'Possibly,' retorted the soldier bluntly; 'but to sift truth from falsehood is your trade, not mine; and I regret that I cannot elucidate the mystery for you.'

'If they would only drop the supernatural,' said the lawyer pensively; 'but, what with demons, omens, charms, witchcraft, talismans, and spells, it is not a case to bring before a British jury, I am afraid.'

'Still less,' said Whitby, 'would it commend itself to a court-martial.'

'Magic or no magic,' said the disconsolate lawyer, 'Private Brown has unaccountably disappeared, and neither the officers nor the men of the 200th Regiment can or will give me any information about him. All the satisfaction I have obtained is that "Private Brown, having bought his discharge, his name is no longer borne on the strength of the regiment." There is an insinuating young scapegrace of an officer called Burke, who, I am sure, *has* screened him, even if he does not know his whereabouts at present; and I can get nothing from the lazy Captain of the company to which Brown belongs or belonged, for he simply refuses to be "bothered" about the matter; while as to the irascible old Colonel Rawley, he was absolutely startling in his profanity, quite the language of the old school; moreover, he affected to think that I had fabricated an infamous charge against him and his regiment.'

'Then,' answered Whitby, 'all this would seem to be in favour of Private Brown, for if he were a bad character his officers would be only too glad to hand him over to the civil authorities, but if he is discharged—and from your statement this seems to be the case—you must look for him elsewhere.'

'Well, sir, I came to you as a last resource.'

'I am afraid I can't help you,' retorted Whitby, in so pointed a manner that the discomfited attorney had no

alternative but to take his departure, feeling that the case was as much involved in mystery as before.

As soon as his unwelcome visitor had left, Whitby mounted his horse and galloped over to Captain Coote's bungalow, which was in the British infantry lines, to discuss with Eleanor the absurd turn which events had taken. He found her anxiously expecting his arrival, for she was tortured by suspense and nervous fears for the safety of the brother she loved so dearly.

'It is all right, Nell,' he said, answering her look of inquiry; 'there is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, and Sims now accuses your brother of——'

'Of what?' said the sister in terror.

'Nothing—only witchcraft,' laughed Whitby, 'or wizardcraft I suppose it would be in his case, and of stealing, while wearing her Majesty's uniform, a patent magic crystal, warranted to preserve its owner in battle or otherwise, and to make him healthy, wealthy, and wise.'

'Nonsense, Dick! your are joking.'

'No, honestly; Sims tells me he has been "instructed" to prefer this grave charge against Wake.'

'Oh, this is too ridiculous! Before, they said he had taken a paper; *now*, that he has stolen a crystal—what next?'

'Oh, but you don't understand; the paper was only a means to an end. It was through this paper he got the crystal, and through the crystal he has entered into partnership with a witch, and by-and-by he will be rolling in money.'

'Oh, Richard, do talk sensibly! All this is past belief.'

'Well,' he said gravely, 'that may be folly, but there is a further charge. He is also accused—in connection with the witch—of having caused the disappearance of several respectable natives who had been travelling with him, and also of having joined some dacoits.'

'What are dacoits?' she asked.

'Armed robbers—brigands, if you will—who live by plunder.'

'But that charge cannot be true,' she said; 'it is too dreadful.'

'It certainly is not very probable,' he answered, 'because dacoits are most unlikely to fraternise with an Englishman; however, if there is black art in the matter, it places the

affair beyond the limits of my experience, and I cannot pretend to understand what it means. Of course, Wake was delirious after his fever, possibly he was bewitched, for he raved about gold, and gems, and treasures hidden in caverns, and also about things, by one of which worthless race he affirmed that he was perpetually haunted.'

'He did not know what he was saying,' said Eleanor. 'He was quite off his head—you know *that*, Richard?'

'Yes; but there was a certain method in his madness, though, for it was wonderful how he clung to one set of ideas, and repeated them over and over again, almost confirming some parts of Mr. Sims' story.'

'That is always the case when the mind is affected,' she said; 'people get hold of a fixed idea and are continually recurring to it.'

'Very likely,' he answered; 'I thought at the time that the whole thing was most singular, showing a very lively imagination, and certainly quite as wild and incomprehensible as Mr. Sims' charges.'

'If you will come with me to the hotel, Richard, I will see my brother and tell him what Sims says, and I can also take Florence Rawley with me, for I know Henry wishes to see her particularly.'

'Yes,' returned Whitby, 'that was another of his fixed ideas; as soon as he was at all convalescent, he repeatedly called for Miss Rawley, asserting that he had something for her.'

'Well,' said Eleanor, 'will you go to the Rawleys' and ask Florence to come with me to Ali Bux's hotel?'

Whitby departed, and Eleanor, now left alone, felt very ill at ease, a state of mind which she had partly concealed from her lover. She recalled her brother's mysterious scheme of making a large fortune, and she reproached herself that Florence and she had credulously advanced him the means to start on his unexplained expedition. The attack of fever had been so sudden that Wake had not been able to give any definite account as to where he had been, or what he had done; and now that he was better in health and more rational, he had been strangely reticent about his journey.

Eleanor Wake, though young in years, was old in many a long and bitter experience. Her brother and herself were

the sole representatives of a once wealthy but now totally ruined family. They were the grandchildren of the celebrated Jack Wake, of Wake Castle, Cornwall, whose sporting deeds and frantic extravagances were, after seventy years, still legendary in that county, and in society generally. Their father had been as hospitable, jovial, and hard riding as the noted Squire, but had added to his extravagances the darker vice of gambling. He was dead; and land, houses, money, all were gone! Eleanor's mother, broken in health as well as in fortune, had become companion and housekeeper to her wealthy bachelor brother, who gave his sister the refuge of his house, but would not receive or do anything for the 'gambler's children.' Henry Wake, while yet in his teens, had run through what little patrimony had remained to him, and, as we have seen, ended by enlisting, while his sister Eleanor had found a protector in a married cousin, Mrs. Coote; and thus, in her existence of twenty-one years, Eleanor, who had been the household angel of a disorganized home, had seen much of the stern side of life. Her amiable but weak mother had turned to her for advice and consolation; her agreeable, reckless father had always been kind and gentle with her, although politely indifferent to his wife and son. Her brother's wildness was the result of bad training and the evil example of a father who had little or no love for him. Naturally affectionate and unselfish, she was always ready to excuse the youth's many faults. The fact was, her sisterly love blinded her to his utter recklessness and want of principle. Young Wake, who was exceedingly handsome, possessed a charm of manner which might have thrown a glamour over the judgment of a more acute observer of character than his young, loving sister.

In the cool of the evening Florence and Eleanor, accompanied by Richard Whitby, arrived at the slovenly-looking little hotel, kept by a native, where the ex-private had taken up his temporary abode. The two girls alighted from the carriage, and Whitby, having promised to call for them in an hour's time, drove away. They mounted a stone staircase and entered a large white-washed room, the furniture of which looked dilapidated and ill-kept. On seeing them, Wake jumped up from the couch on which he was lying, with an exclamation of pleasure. In consequence of the fever he was gaunt and thin, looking like the spectre of

his former self; his large dark eyes gleamed wildly, yet sadly, and his black hair, which had been cut very short during his illness, made his pallid face appear all the more ghastly.

'Oh, Harry,' said Florence, who had not seen him for some time, 'how ill you look!'

'Do I?' said Wake. 'Well, I suppose it was touch and go whether I pulled through or not; and perhaps I have lived,' he added, with a bitter laugh, 'like many a better man, only to spite my heirs.'

'Why, what an odd speech!' said pretty, smiling Florence. 'Who are your heirs?'

'Who?' answered the young man. 'People who, like most heirs, would sooner I was dead than alive.'

'Then,' said the girl sweetly, 'we are not amongst the number. We are delighted that you are alive and getting strong again. You ought to get away on sick leave, that you may be quite well when you join your new regiment.'

Wake crossed the room, and, opening a small chiffonnier, took out a parcel, which he handed to Florence.

'There, Miss Rawley,' he said, 'fair exchange is no robbery. You gave me your bracelet when last we met, and I have brought you this from Delhi in return.'

The girl opened the small packet, which contained a glittering necklace of turquoises set in gold.

'How lovely!' she said, with sparkling eyes.

Eleanor drew near, and looking at the costly ornament, said:

'It is very beautiful; but where did you get it, Harry?'

'On Tom Tiddler's ground, picking up gold and silver,' he answered mockingly.

His sister looked earnestly at him, searching his countenance keenly.

'Then you *have* found Tom Tiddler's ground! Where is it?' she said.

'About thirty miles north of Delhi, I believe, though, you know, geography was never my strong point. My confounded illness has hindered me, or I should now be one of the richest men in England, Eleanor! I have found a treasure the value of which is almost priceless; with it I shall buy back Wake Castle and all our once broad acres in Cornwall. It would be far better to be Wake, of Wake

Castle, and follow the Exmoor staghounds, than to be Private Brown in the hot barracks of Meerut !’

The words he uttered so excitedly awoke a sympathetic echo in his sister’s soul ; for to recover their old home and estates, and regain their former position in the world, was the dearest wish of her heart.

‘ But what right have you to the treasure of which you speak ?’

‘ As much as anyone else,’ he answered. ‘ It is treasure trove, and he who finds keeps ; it belongs to no one in particular.’

‘ Not to the Newab of Doobghur ?’ she asked, looking at him scrutinisingly.

‘ No,’ he answered. ‘ I have as good a claim to it as he has ; he is no more the lineal descendant of Ali Kareem—who hid the treasure—than I am. The Newab was too afraid of the demons who are supposed to guard the treasure to go and look for it himself, so I went and found it.’

This answer but half satisfied his anxious sister. ‘ Did you not find a crystal ?’ she asked.

‘ No ! I believe not. I found what I hope is a large diamond. Was it a crystal ? What do you know about it ?’

‘ Only this. Mr. Sims the lawyer has complained to Richard Whitby that you have illegally obtained possession of a magic crystal.’

‘ The devil !’ laughed Wake ; ‘ what a sell ; I thought it was a valuable diamond.’

‘ Did you ?’ she continued gently. ‘ And Mr. Sims further says that you have taken up with a witch, joined a band of dacoits, and murdered some respectable natives !’

‘ Then,’ said Wake, suddenly blazing out with anger, ‘ that lawyer is a d——d liar, like all his tribe. I have found an ancient treasure, it is true ; but I found it by my own right hand, without aid from witches, dacoits, or anybody else ; and, what is more, as soon as I can travel I shall go, collect my fortune, send it to England, and then horsewhip the lawyer. Who knows but that I shall become as rich as any of our ancestors ? Now, Miss Florence, you shall decide. Have I not as much right to this wealth as a cowardly nigger, who hadn’t the pluck to do it himself, but sent a sneaking Thug to murder me ? Only that was a game in which two could play, so I shot the beggar !’

'I don't understand these things,' Florence answered; 'all I can say is that I wish you well, and if you *could* buy back your old home I should be charmed.'

'As far as I am concerned,' said Eleanor warmly, 'I prefer honest poverty to ill-gotten gains. If your fortune has been honestly acquired, I am glad; but I would sooner die a beggar than deprive anyone of his possessions.'

'Get money, my son,' said Wake derisively; 'get money—honestly if you can—but get money. Thank Heaven! my conscience, like my constitution, is very robust, and no fantastical scruples will prevent me from acquiring the hoard of a long-defunct Moslem.'

The girls now rose to leave. Florence ran nimbly down the stairs, but Eleanor lingered awhile to say a few words of caution to her brother Henry.

'You had better leave this place as soon as you can,' she said; 'that lawyer is still seeking you, and, as he will be well paid, he will leave no stone unturned to establish the Newab of Doobghur's claim to the treasure.'

'Well, Nell! do not let Richard Whitby know what I have done, or intend to do. He is always on the side of the natives, and would not uphold me.'

'Don't meddle with any more, Harry,' she said; 'leave it alone. I have a presentiment that it will bring misfortune to you.'

The obstinacy which was a great feature in Wake's character now vehemently asserted itself.

'I will get that treasure and send it to England,' he said savagely; 'in spite of Whitby, Sims, the Newab, or even the British Government! That a fellow should find enormous wealth for the mere trouble of picking it up, and then allow himself to be robbed of it, is absurd.'

'Well, then, at least take care of yourself, dear,' she said; 'you have enemies.'

'I can take care of myself, Nell,' he retorted defiantly; 'and am more than a match for them all. I will go this very night, if I can, and before thirty-six hours are over I shall have unearthed the rest of my spoil, or I am a Dutchman!'

'Then you will not be at my wedding next Tuesday,' she said.

'I could easily come back if you wish it; it is only a sixty miles' ride across country.'

'No,' she answered. 'On second thoughts I feel that, much as I should like your presence, you would be better away. I am afraid of that lawyer! Richard says that he does not know that you are now an officer, and have resumed your own name, but this seems due more to luck than to good management. If you get away to the Punjaub before Sims has time to find you out, all clue will be lost, and you will be able to start a fresh life, with an unclouded name and with untarnished honour. Everyone has heard the story of Jack Wake of Wake Castle, and the fact that you belong to an old county family will be a good introduction into your new regiment, and to your brother-officers.'

'If I succeed in shipping my treasure,' he said, 'I don't know that I shall be particularly hot upon serving her Majesty. I should send in my papers directly.'

She pondered sadly. 'Would that be wise, after we had so much trouble in obtaining your commission?'

'Of course, to live like an officer would be Paradise,' he answered, 'compared with what I have gone through as Private Brown; but what would suit me best would be a good hunting stable in the old country. Remember that Whitby is to know nothing of my affairs. If I succeed, he will want to put a spoke in my wheel; and if I fail, he will say "I told you so," and leave me to paddle my own canoe.'

'You are unjust to Richard,' she said angrily; 'you do not know him yet; he is the soul of honour and disinterestedness.'

'I know he is a very good fellow,' answered her brother; 'he is all right for you, Nell, but too good altogether for a sinner like me.'

She gave him an affectionate kiss, and hastening downstairs to rejoin her companions, who were waiting in the carriage, she returned home in a thoughtful mood.

CHAPTER XI.

A MESS DINNER.

It was now the month of March, and the weather in Northern India was becoming unpleasantly warm, for the hot wind, as yet uncooled by tatties, sent fierce, sultry blasts into the house. Some of the English inhabitants

were preparing to fly either to the cool breezes of the hills, or were homeward bound to England. However, in spite of the approaching hot weather, the ordinary routine of life went on, and amongst these commonplace incidents were the weekly guest-nights, held at the various mess-houses at Meerut.

On Tuesday the 2nd of March, the 200th Regiment were entertaining visitors, and Captain Whitby and his brother were included among the strangers. Their mess-table was handsomely decorated with fruit and flowers, fine china, and old silver plate, while the numerous wax lights which glittered in the silver candelabra were protected by glasses from the breeze caused by the prettily-painted punkah which waved to and fro overhead. The officers were dressed in crisp, white garments, with thin red jackets, and, in spite of the state of the atmosphere, were determined to enjoy their dinner, and make the best of the inevitable heat. Solemn black-bearded Mussulman kitmutghars, in snowy linen costumes and turbans, which looked refreshingly clean and cool, stood behind the officers' chairs. On weekly guest-nights the regimental band was stationed on the terrace, and commenced its musical performance with the National Anthem, while the decanters were passed round, and the first and last toast of the evening, 'The Queen,' was drunk.

Among the notable features of the scene was the stern face of Colonel Rawley, who was looking more than usually disagreeable; Captain Maunders, however, seemed at peace with all mankind, whilst eating an excellently-cooked repast. The dinner passed off without any marked incident; but all through the meal young Burke, who was usually the life of the regiment, looked pale and melancholy, and was astonishingly silent. When dinner was concluded, he rose, and strolled out upon the terrace in front of the bungalow, where the band was performing, and puffed his cheroot calmly into the balmily Eastern evening air. As the natives of India seldom or never acquire a taste for European music, and as there was no other public, and the soldiers were in barracks, the admirable band seemed playing for him alone. The click of the billiard-balls, and an occasional remark of 'two by honours and the odd trick,' were the only sounds that came from the interior of the mess-house. Soon, however,

the silence was broken by Captain Maunders and a smart dragoon, who emerged smoking upon the terrace; but they were only abusing the service.

Shortly after, just as Desmond Burke had thrown himself into a lounging-chair, Richard Whitby approached the spot. Whitby looked at Burke for a moment, and then said:

‘Why, Burke, what has happened? You certainly have a most rueful expression of countenance, which is not your style at all, and does not become you.’

‘Oh!’ answered Burke, with a heavy sigh, ‘I’m down on my luck altogether. The C. O. is beastly disagreeable, Florence has cut me dead, and “Unlimited Loo” has treated me abominably.’

‘But how has it all happened?’ asked Whitby, interested in spite of himself by the Irishman’s pitiful complaining tones.

‘There never was anything like a woman for starting the devil of a row,’ answered Burke. ‘It all began at that confounded soldiers’ ball; of all the vile entertainments I ever was at, *that* was the most odious. I never had such an evening in my life. The thermometer must have been standing at 150°, and they had taken down the punkahs in order to make room for putting up fanciful paper decorations, coloured lamps, etc. The wives of all the non-commissioned officers requested the honour of dancing with me. “Mrs. Corporal Timmins, sir, would be much obliged if you would dance the next polka with her,” said my colour-sergeant, and then I was compelled to be whirling a buxom lady (whose dancing had not been learned in the most listless of schools) about the room till I was ready to drop. Then the corporal would insist on my pledging him in rum-and-water, adding fire to my already intensely overheated idiosyncrasy. So what with drinking rum-and-water, dancing with Mrs. Corporal Timmins, and having been snubbed by Louisa, who was in a bad temper, how on earth was a fellow to go and make love to the girl he really cared for? Then, too, I did not choose to make my Colonel’s daughter look conspicuous, or to excite the gossip of the barrack-rooms. But Florrie, poor little soul, didn’t understand. She is honest as the day, but high-spirited, and won’t stand being—as she thought—neglected. So when I went to see her the next day, she pitched into me right, left, and centre.’

Here the Ensign took a sip of brandy-and-water, and, delighted at having found a sympathetic listener to whom he could pour out all his woes, went on :

‘What could a fellow do? What could he say? She was quite unreasonable. She accused me of being engaged to “Unlimited Loo,” and said it was the “gup” of the station. What *could* a fellow say? “Florrie,” I answered, “you know that’s all bosh! I do not make love to Louisa on my own account, but for my friend Carew; now, Carew is a very rich fellow, and he has been in love with Louisa for years, and is going to educate her. This is all gospel truth,” said I, “and if you don’t believe me, faith—well, go and ask her herself.”’

And the Irishman, as he got excited, lapsed into the true Milesian accent.

‘And did Miss Rawley go?’ asked Whitby.

‘She did; and that bold girl Louisa lied like fun. “Yes,” said she, “of course I am engaged to Desmond Burke, and what business is that of yours, Miss Rawley?” Now, of all the audacious and shameless lies, to say *that* of me! It is true that I have carried on with her a little, but it was only to make the running for Carew. So I denied it flat to Florence, but she wouldn’t believe me a bit, and then off I went to “Unlimited Loo.” “Now, Louisa,” I said, “you shouldn’t have got a fellow into such a devil of a scrape, for Miss Rawley will never forgive me, and although, you know, I think you a deuced fine girl, you would never engage yourself to a poor ensign like me.” And she said coolly, “Only give me the chance, Desmond.” (Think of *that* now!) “I admire handsome men, and there is not another fellow in the garrison as tall and good-looking as you are.” The fact was, she blarneyed me, and what could a fellow do? If a handsome girl makes hot love to him, a man loses his head a bit: so, of course, I told Louisa *she* was the only woman I ever loved, and we gave ourselves out as engaged, but it was only for a lark. We didn’t mean it; at least, I didn’t.’

Whitby walked up and down in an angry manner.

‘I never heard of anything worse than your behaviour, Burke,’ he said.

‘That’s what Carew said,’ answered the imperturbable Irishman. ‘He came over to my place with two big pistols, and wanted to fight me. “Well,” said I, “if it’s fighting

you want, I'm your man, but it's all a mistake entirely. Come and ask Miss Page. It is true I have made love to her a little, but it was on your account, Carew, not on mine." So over we go to the old Major's bungalow, and when Louisa heard that Carew wished to shoot me, she was dreadfully frightened. She's a good-hearted girl, and tried to make it all straight. She assured Carew she would consider herself engaged to *him* instead of to me. Carew is an awful good fellow ; a little touched, perhaps, but he has lots of money, and a fine place in Essex ; so it's a good thing for Louisa. I am the only one who is left out in the cold. Florence won't speak to me, or look at me ; the Colonel treats me like a dog ; and to get out of the way until it has all blown over, I shall go off on leave ; still, it's precious disagreeable, and I shall try to exchange from this regiment.'

Whitby walked away.

'What a wonderful girl that Louisa is!' he thought. 'She turns all the fellows' heads. There is no doubt but that Wake is also wild about her. But what a shame to have made such mischief. Now I can understand why poor Florence has looked so miserable for the last two days. I must get Eleanor to try and put this matter right for them, for it would be a pity that two young lives should be spoiled by the machinations of a heartless flirt.'

Ensign Burke and Florence Rawley had unusual opportunities of knowing each other intimately. The 200th Regiment had come round the Cape not many months before, and in the long voyage of some seven months at sea they had been thrown daily and hourly into each other's society. Miss Wake and her chaperon, Mrs. Coote, had also come out in the same troopship. There were other ladies on board, and in that small world there had been the quarrels, the love-makings, the jealousies, and the friendships which the abnormal existence on board ship brings forth. Burke had only joined the 200th just before that regiment sailed, and had become exceedingly popular with officers and men. Light-hearted, energetic, and gay, he had been the life of the company on the voyage out. 'Old Rawley,' as he was irreverently called by his subalterns, took a fancy to the young Irishman. Colonel Rawley's blustering and aggressive manner had made him more enemies than he deserved. But these outward defects had

not prevented Burke from appreciating the sterling merit of his chief, and he would say, in answer to the grumbings of seniors and juniors, 'The C. O. is a brick ! There's not his equal in the service.'

'Nice lad that,' the old man would say of Burke. 'By gad, sir, those were the sort of boys we had in the Peninsula; always ready for work, and thinking of their men before themselves.'

The old soldier, feeling sometimes that the day would come when Florence would no longer have a father, and knowing that she had no near relations to take care of her, was anxious to see her settled in a home of her own, and, although regretting that his daughter did not contemplate a more brilliant marriage, still was determined to leave her free to do as she liked, the more especially as he had formed so favourable an opinion of the attractive young man who courted her.

As Whitby strolled leisurely towards the mess-room, Captain Maunders walked up to Burke, who was still sitting in a very disconsolate attitude.

'Have you heard about that fellow Brown of our company?' he asked. 'I always knew he was a gentleman, and now it seems that he is the grandson of the well-known Jack Wake of Cornwall, and that the pretty Miss Wake, whom Whitby is about to marry, is his sister :

This was news to Burke, but he merely said :

'Oh ! now I can understand why Miss Rawley and Miss Wake took such an interest in his welfare.'

'Of course they would,' said the Captain. 'Well, it seems he has got a commission in a good regiment—the Tipperary Rangers—and I hear he is heir to a rich uncle, who will probably make him a fine allowance. The Sergeant-Major tells me that he has left Meerut with a large retinue of servants, horses, and camels. Gad ! the fellow must be as lavish with his money as his grandfather was, who ran through an enormous fortune in no time.'

'I should think Wake was glad to leave the 200th,' answered Burke. 'I always liked the fellow myself, and I think he will make a good officer.'

'I hear, too,' continued Maunders, 'that Sims is still poking about the barracks. I suppose Wake's creditors think they will get paid now that he has a commission.'

Gad ! I expect that lad will be more likely to run up fresh debts than discharge old ones.'

Burke, who was himself always in a state of insolvency, said :

'For my part, I hope he will diddle the Jews and the lawyers,' and then he relapsed into utter despondency, for what hope in life was there left for a young man who had quarrelled with his best friends, was estranged from the woman he really loved, and was experiencing that most depressing of all sensations—the knowledge that he had made a fool of himself !

'Alas, how easily things go wrong !
A word too much or a kiss too long,
Then comes the mist and the sweeping rain,
And life is never the same again.'

Time did not heal the quarrel between Florence and her lover ; on the Rawleys' side there was outraged feeling, while young Burke played his cards very ill. He longed for reconciliation, but, with the stupidity and inexperience of youth, he allowed himself to be further entangled by the cajoleries of a scheming woman of the world. Yet the faithful little Florence, though she grew sadder and paler day by day, was too proud to let Burke know how keenly she felt his desertion. The doctor who was called in recommending change of scene, Miss Rawley left the station of Meerut, to pay some visits in the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CANTONMENTS OF DELHI.

RICHARD WHITBY and Eleanor Wake were married in the station church at Meerut by the military chaplain, and all the fashionable society of the place assembled to witness the ceremony. Miss Rawley was the only bridesmaid, and John Whitby officiated as best man to his brother.

The house to which Whitby took his bride was in the cantonments of Delhi. It was a pretty thatched cottage, standing in a well-kept garden, gay with flowers, for he was a great lover of floriculture, and attended to his plants and shrubs with his own hands. The verdure of his grass and the fine bloom of his flowers was due to artificial irrigation.

The interior of the bungalow had been made equally bright and cheerful by the magic of a woman's presence. The windows were draped with snowy muslin tied up with coloured ribbons, while the remainder of the furniture of the first home of the young couple was inexpensive but in good taste. The ornaments, conspicuous by their number and newness, consisted mostly of wedding presents.

The slender figure of Eleanor flitted about, looking after her household affairs, or arranging flowers in the rooms. Her face, wreathed with happy smiles, looked bright as a beam of sunshine, as, with a vase of flowers which she had just filled, she entered her husband's own special den.

'What is it, Dick?' she exclaimed anxiously, for she saw he looked vexed. 'What has my brother Henry done now?'

'Poor Nell!' answered Whitby, with rather a wan smile, 'what it is to have a black sheep in the family. But it is even worse than that; it is my misfortunes this time, my own wrongs and grievances, and what I feel most is that you will suffer with me.'

'Don't think of me,' she answered; 'I do not mind anything that we share together.'

'Well,' said Whitby, taking an open letter from the table, 'when I proposed to you I hoped to have got a good staff appointment which would have doubled my pay; and see! that great little Lord Dalhousie, as Sir Charles Napier called him, says, "I'll never let *that* fellow have anything.'"

'And does "*that* fellow" mean you?' she asked.

'Yes, Nellie, it does.'

'Why is it?'

'It is rather a long story, but you must have patience. To begin; Lord Dalhousie is as autocratic as the Czar of all the Russias, and in this case, I think, has behaved badly to my regiment, the 38th Native Infantry, which was one of the finest in the service, composed of picked men drawn from Oude, who were enlisted for "local," and not for "general" service. That means that they would not cross the sea, of which, from motives of superstition, they have a great horror. About three years ago, I was quartered in the fort of Calcutta. Lord Dalhousie, seeing what a fine body of men the 38th were, wished them to go to Rangoon. It was represented to him that they could not be ordered there. "However," said his lordship, "the men must be made to go."

‘I was particularly popular with my men, as I knew their language better than most officers. So the Colonel told me to find out if they would sail, and the different captains spoke to their men in order to ascertain their sentiments, but it was only too evident that the men of Oude had no desire to go to Rangoon by sea. Although this was known, a parade was called, and the Colonel asked them if they would embark; company by company they refused. This was communicated to the Governor-General, who was furious, and is reported to have said, “If they would not go on foreign service, he would make them suffer for it.”

‘In the hot weather we received orders to march to Dacca, a distance of several hundred miles, a journey which had hitherto been always done in boats. We left Calcutta in April, and by the month of October, at parade, one officer and one private represented our once magnificent regiment. The rest were either in their graves, in hospital, or away on leave. I barely escaped with my life, but took sick leave to England, where I partially recovered; but I shall never again be the man I once was; and as to the 38th, why, we have now only raw boys and recruits—most of our veterans are no more. If the 38th Regiment had committed a military offence, they should have been disbanded, and not irregularly punished.’

‘The odious wretch!’ said Eleanor, with fiery eyes. ‘But why,’ she asked, ‘should Lord Dalhousie bear malice against you in particular?’

‘Well, as far as that goes, he says he will never employ any officer of the 38th, added to which, he has been misinformed that I could have influenced the men to go to Rangoon, had I chosen to do so; but that is too absurd. My men, the men who are now dead, would have done anything in this world for me, and God knows I would have died for them, but in this matter they stood upon their rights. They had been enlisted to serve in India; why on earth should I persuade them to act against their conscience and prejudices, by crossing the sea? Not that anything I could have said would have influenced the regiment as a whole, though I might have persuaded certain individuals.’

‘It is a shame!’ cried Eleanor.

‘Well,’ said Whitby bitterly, ‘we shall be so much the poorer for it. Here I am at thirty-eight, a captain in a

marching regiment, and I fear I shall not rise higher for years.'

'I don't mind, Dick,' she said cheerfully. 'We are quite rich enough, and you know I have never been used to much luxury.'

'I do not care much for money,' said Whitby, 'except to give you everything you could wish for. You are worthy to be a queen, Eleanor, and not the wife of an unknown officer in a Native Infantry regiment.'

'Don't think I am discontented,' she answered; 'I have your love, which makes me the happiest and richest woman in the world.'

Their conversation continued in this lover-like strain, and Whitby for a time at least forgot his frustrated ambition, and the piece of official oppression or blundering which had embittered the last few years of his life.

One night in the week a military band played on the broad and level parade at Delhi, on which occasions the crowd of pedestrians, the numerous equestrians, and the many carriages made a gay scene. To this gathering Mrs. Whitby's carriage was slowly making its way, and in it were seated Captain Whitby, his wife, and Florence Rawley, who had come on a few days' visit to her cousin. As they neared the band they saw, to their intense surprise, Miss Page ride past, accompanied by Ensign Burke.

'How well Louisa Page rides,' exclaimed Whitby, 'and what a splendid horse she is on! One can plainly see she has got a firm hold of that foolish Burke.'

This remark was not very pleasant to Florence.

'I am sure Mr. Burke does not admire her much,' cried Eleanor, trying to get over the awkwardness of the remark.

She felt that Florence had been hurt by the mocking glance of her smiling rival, the more especially as young Burke seemed unpleasantly cheerful in her society. He had bowed gaily to Mrs. Whitby, but seemed a little disconcerted at seeing Florence in the carriage.

'Where is Mr. Carew?' inquired Miss Page of her cavalier, after they had passed the Whitbys.

'There he is, riding in the crowd,' said the Ensign, pointing in a certain direction, where the stout squire was to be discerned seemingly shunning observation. 'He prefers comfort to display,' continued Burke, 'and has turned out in an

easy-going coat, and a loose suit of white material, instead of the tight frock-coat and high hat which society expects of him. Do you want to see him very much ?

‘ Oh no,’ she said carelessly.

‘ I’m afraid that my society does not content you,’ said he. ‘ I wish I had the power to make myself agreeable.’

‘ Don’t talk nonsense, Mr. Burke. Do you know many of the officers of the 38th ?’

‘ I’ve spoken to one or two of them. Are you much interested in them ?’

‘ Oh, not particularly ; but one likes to know who everybody is. But is it true that Mr. Carew is as well off as persons say ?’

‘ I really don’t know,’ said Burke ; ‘ but I wish I could say truthfully that he is comparatively poor, or with an embarrassed estate.’

They had stopped their horses to listen to the band, and two or three more officers came up to talk with them, as Miss Page’s arrival at Delhi was an immense attraction, and had, indeed, formed the principal topic of conversation at the three messes of the garrison, single ladies of personal beauty being at a great premium in India.

Miss Page and her father, accompanied by Ensign Burke and his cousin, Mr. Carew, the traveller (popularly known as the ‘ T. G.’), had come to Delhi sight-seeing, to view the much-vaunted Kootub, and other marvels of the city of the great Mogul. The learned squire held the theory that Indraput, or Indraprestha, was the cradle of the human race, and the scene of the tragedy in the Garden of Eden.

The musicians commenced the last waltz imported from Germany, and the lively strains put a termination to the somewhat sentimental conversation of the group surrounding Miss Page. But there was one spectator who had been watching her and her circle of adorers with anger in his heart and a look of discontent on his handsome swarthy face. This was Wake, who had been staying at his sister’s house, but had not known that the Pages were in Delhi. He was on foot, and approached the two riders, who were near the band.

By this time the versatile Burke had transferred his attention to a Mrs. Maude, a pretty lady, to whom, with

ready wit, he began to pay those compliments for which her soul craved.

‘I hope you have been enjoying yourself for the last half-hour,’ Wake said pointedly to Miss Page.

‘Oh yes, thank you!’ she answered sarcastically. ‘I’ve been very much delighted by the music; I think this is such an excellent band.’

‘I thought you seemed to be devoting more attention to conversation than to music!’ he sneered.

‘I think I distributed my favours very impartially between the two; but you speak as if you thought I had no business to talk while the band was performing.’

‘No; I am not so utterly deficient in good manners myself as to impute rudeness to you. The fact is that—you force me to explain myself—I was desirous of putting an end to your flirting with the men with whom you were smiling and talking so pleasantly.’

‘Would you not have me endeavour to make myself agreeable? Would you like me to be always silent and morose? You are very exacting.’

‘I know I am very stupid, and perhaps offensive to you; but the fact is, I cannot bear to see you happy when I am away. I am always miserable when I am not in your presence; and, Louisa, I can restrain the words no longer. You have long known how much I dislike——’

‘Good-evening, Miss Page,’ interrupted the pleasant and (to Louisa) welcome voice of Carew. ‘Here’s Captain Barker, most anxious to be introduced to you.’

‘Confound it!’ muttered Wake to himself; but there was no help for it, and he was compelled to press back the words which were rising to his lips, and join in an ordinary conversation. He was not, however, very successful, and Captain Barker, of the 38th Native Infantry, told him he looked so melancholy that he had better come and have a peg at their mess, to revive him.

Soon after the band marched off, and Miss Page made this the excuse for leaving, and she cantered away, accompanied by Carew and a bevy of beaux.

Mrs. Whitby also ordered her carriage to be driven off; there was nothing else to be done, and accordingly the Whitby party went home.

On arriving at their bungalow, Wake and his brother-in-

law seated themselves in the veranda, lighted cheroots, and were served with iced soda-water by a kitmutghar. Miss Rawley retired to her room, and veracity obliges us to say that she wept tears of mortification and wounded love.

Mrs. Whitby's handsome, statuesque face was very pale, but there was a look of quiet determination on her small, well-cut mouth. She saw by her brother's moody face that the behaviour of Louisa Page that day at the band-stand had deeply annoyed him. She knew, too, that Florence was vexed and humiliated for the same reason. Eleanor thought it was bad enough that Florence had lost her lover ; but it was mortifying to the last degree that Burke should flaunt his indifference to her and his admiration of her rival in the eyes of the world. So the idea entered Eleanor's mind that she would see if she could not bring that arrant flirt, Louisa Page, to reason.

'Harry,' she said to her brother, 'I can stand this no longer! I am going to that woman.'

'What woman?' he asked crossly.

'Louisa Page,' she answered.

'You will gain nothing by that move, Eleanor.'

'But surely she can be expostulated with?' she continued.

'She cannot realize what she is doing.'

'Oh! she knows well enough what she is about.'

'Do you mind my going, Harry?'

'Go if you like, but you will do no good.'

Eleanor then turned to her husband.

'Richard dear,' she said, 'I am going to pay a visit, but shall be back in time for dinner.'

'A duty visit, I fear, from your severe look, Nell,' said her husband.

'It is a matter of duty more than pleasure, certainly,' she answered. 'Good-bye, dear.' And then she stooped down and kissed the forehead of her brother, who looked sullenly savage.

Mrs. Whitby drove away in her pony phaeton; she was starting on an expedition of a singular nature, and one very antagonistic to her reserved and retiring disposition. Eleanor Whitby was not sparkling nor witty, but she looked as if she could be both; but from shyness she seldom spoke, and even then hardly ever advanced beyond a monosyllabic reply. But her silence and repose were her greatest charms,

for though she said but little, she always listened courteously and intelligently. This air of coldness was the outward disguise—due either to nature or education—of a loving, self-sacrificing temperament; she was still young, and she had been trained in the old-school way, and had been taught that a woman should never act or think independently. She was honourable, and possibly at that time a bit narrow-minded. However, she was now going to interview and rebuke that forward young person, ‘Unlimited Loo!’ This was a great effort to her, but she considered it was due to the brother she loved devotedly, and the friend to whom she was sincerely attached, to speak some words of remonstrance to the giddy ‘garrison hack.’

Miss Page was staying in a detached house at some little distance, in the very heart of the Eastern city of Delhi. There was a charm in the strange beauty of the city of the great Mogul which inspired Eleanor (who had passed the greater part of her life in a prosaic country town, and had never travelled out of England) with thoughts half chaotic, seeming to take her from a matter-of-fact world to a realm of romance. This feeling was increased when she reached the quaint old palace, surrounded by battlemented walls, in which the Pages were staying. Eleanor Whitby’s carriage passed under a lofty Moorish archway, and as she drove up to the door of the dwelling, a shot whizzed past her face. She jumped up with a cry of surprise and terror, when from behind the bushes of an orange-grove some people rushed forward excitedly, and she recognised Miss Page, Ensign Burke, Mr. Carew, and the stout figure of Captain Maunders, amongst some ladies and gentlemen with whom she was not acquainted.

‘Mrs. Whitby!’ was exclaimed almost in a chorus; ‘how fortunate that you were not hurt!’

‘We were at pistol practice,’ explained Miss Page, ‘and not expecting visitors at this hour,’ she added rather pointedly, ‘we were firing in the garden, and I am afraid that exceedingly wild shot was due to me.’

Eleanor was rather pale, but she looked very collected. The truth was, she was hardly as alarmed at the stray bullet—the danger of which she had not realized—as by the certain evil of what she feared would be an exceedingly unpleasant interview.

‘Have you come to call on me?’ Miss Page asked rather brusquely.

‘I have,’ returned Mrs. Whitby

‘Then,’ retorted Louisa ungraciously, ‘you had better come into the house.’

The fact was, her own sex did not speak well of Louisa Page, and she returned their scorn with interest. She openly said she hated women, and loathed girls, and it was undoubtedly true that she had not a single female friend.

Miss Page led the way into an enormous and nearly empty hall; from that she entered a gigantic drawing-room very sparsely furnished. She conducted Mrs. Whitby to a couch and stood herself rather defiantly by a window, and watched Eleanor with anything but an amiable expression of countenance.

The colour rose on Eleanor’s pale face.

‘You must think it strange that—that I come to see you,’ she faltered, her confusion preventing her expressing herself clearly.

‘I do think it strange,’ answered Louisa.

‘There are circumstances which connect us,’ said Eleanor, recovering herself.

‘Unfortunately for me, it is so,’ answered Louisa.

‘If it is unfortunate, the misfortune was of your own making,’ said Eleanor, rather bitterly.

‘Yes,’ cried Louisa, ‘I have been a fool! If I could only undo the folly of four years ago, when I was no more than a child, how thankful I should be!’

‘But,’ said Eleanor, ‘you cannot undo your marriage, and therefore I think it very wrong of you to be making so many people miserable.’

‘My marriage was not legal,’ cried Louisa, ‘and I mean to repudiate it.’

‘That is a mere subterfuge. You know it was perfectly legal, and no power on earth can annul it.’

‘If that is true,’ cried Louisa recklessly, ‘I will undo it myself, and go off with some one of the many good fellows who would be only too glad to take me on any terms.’

‘Then you would be doing not only what is very wicked, but very foolish,’ said Eleanor. ‘You would not be a wife, and you would place the man you elope with in a false and wretched position. You would be miserable, and you would

make him the same. He could leave you at any minute, too.'

'What of that?' said Louisa defiantly; 'I would then take up with somebody else.'

'I do not believe you are in earnest, talking in this way! Why should you nourish this feeling of animosity against my brother, whose greatest fault is loving you too well?'

'That his greatest fault!' laughed Louisa sardonically. 'A youth who drinks, runs into debt, disgraces his family, and finally enlists as a common soldier!'

'I admit that Henry has been wild and foolish, but are *you* without blame? He ran into debt to spend the money upon *you*, he took to drink (for a time) because you left him, and he enlisted in order to follow you to India.'

'Oh!' she sneered; 'of course he is a perfect saint, while no colours are black enough to paint *me*.'

'But do I not speak the truth?' asked Eleanor.

'You are charmingly candid, certainly,' she answered, 'but listen to *my* side of the story. When I was a silly, romantic schoolgirl, Henry Wake, at the age of nineteen, persuaded me to elope from school with him. My friends, his friends, were furious! We had not a sixpence between us. We lodged over a cheesemonger's in London, in the dog-days. I have hated the smell of cheese ever since. Harry drank; I cried; and Heaven only knows what would have become of us had not my father taken me away from what I found to be a hell upon earth. No; I will never, never return to Henry Wake. He is always in some low scrape or other, and he frightens me out of my wits; so if you come to me, to preach ideas, of wifely duty to that black sheep, who hasn't an elementary idea of decent conduct, you are only wasting your breath, and you had better go away.'

Eleanor was not much astonished at this outburst. 'But there is another thing I wish to speak to you about,' she said. 'Do you know that my friend Florence Rawley was engaged to Desmond Burke? Poor Florence! she is not like you; she is breaking her heart about this affair. Mr. Burke says he does not care for you, but still he neglects her to be seen daily with you in public places.'

'Oh,' said Louisa, 'I am not going to catch husbands for other girls. Let them catch them themselves. Of course,

Desmond, or any other man, would be bored with that bread-and-butter miss! I'm not his keeper, but, if you particularly wish it, I will tell Burke to go and call on Miss Rawley.'

'If my brother only knew what you really are, he would soon lose his infatuation for you! It is you who have driven him into all the mistakes he has made; seeing the mischief you have done, and are doing, I shall think it my duty to inform the world that you are a married woman who renounces her duty to her husband.'

'Very well, Mrs. Whitby,' Louisa said defiantly. 'Do so, by all means, and I will inform the world that I refuse to live with a murderer and thief! It was your brother, Eleanor Whitby, the ex-private Henry Brown, who murdered the fakir and stole the documents belonging to the Newab of Doobghur, and you and your husband knew it, and you are conniving to hide a criminal from justice! You, who are so exceedingly virtuous, have perverted poor Richard Whitby, who was once the very champion of legality and British uprightness! Go, and do your worst; but I will make India too hot for you, unless you hold your tongue about me and my affairs.'

Eleanor rose and left the room without even saying farewell. As she drove homewards she felt utterly discomfited and humiliated, and she feared that she had blundered, and only made matters worse by her interference.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN TENTS.

ALTHOUGH Louisa Page had been very bold in words to Mrs. Whitby, yet she, above all things, feared exposure, for, with all her seeming wildness, she had a great dread of Mrs. Grundy, and had hitherto (although doing exactly as she liked) succeeded in propitiating that capricious dame. She was exceedingly angry with Eleanor. What business had she to interfere? How silly of Florence Rawley to complain! Why had she not the cleverness to retain the lover she had attracted? Would Eleanor let the world know that she was a married woman? If she did, Burke would infallibly cease his attentions, and, what touched her

far more deeply, she would lose the devotion of Mr. Carew. Then Louisa thought angrily of the gossip there would be in all the stations of India, where her character had often been picked to pieces, and she foresaw the triumph of Mrs. Brigadier Gubbins, and Mrs. Chief Commissioner Bloggs, who had denounced her as 'bad style' and 'fast,' and had traduced her at Mooltan, Mussoorie, and elsewhere. How pleased they would be to propagate the story of her secret marriage! As to her counter-stroke of exposing Wake—she dared not do it; she was legally married to the ex-private, and preferred being tied to a rich man rather than a poor one; besides, she might have to return the trinkets he had given her, and to part with jewellery was an act hateful to her soul. Happy thought! she would go into tents, and take her admirers with her, for, in the open country, she would be far from both bitter tongues and envious eyes.

Reginald Carew flattered himself that he was successfully moulding the mind of Miss Page into conformity with his own. To please him she had adopted a slightly eccentric but highly picturesque style of dress, which made her look rustically bewitching. It consisted of a little straw hat and flowered cotton gown, which constituted a fascinating combination of the simplicity of the country and the elegance of the town. Thus attired, she accompanied Carew and other adorers up the towers of soaring minarets and through gloomy mosques, or made distant excursions to romantic ruins. The poetical squire thought she looked 'a fairy-like being, fitted to live in a garden entirely upon the scent of flowers.' Sometimes he compared her to the lady who tended the spot where Shelley's sensitive plant grew. Still, it needed a strong contingent of the military, in addition to Carew, to enable Louisa to survive the infliction of exploring these mouldering edifices and other traces of long-past civilization. As she wandered through the deserted halls of former potentates, she sighed for the shady, well-watered Mall at Meerut, crowded with fashionables. Yet, when the squire talked to her of art, or expatiated on the beauties of Hindoo and Mogul architecture, or gave her disquisitions on the harmony of colour, or even discussed metaphysics—for he tried to give her a taste for a little of everything—though she was not quite certain of what it all meant, still

her eyes, and now and then her smile, were sufficiently eloquent in reply. When he occasionally spoke of science, or touched upon topics which are usually considered too erudite for the ordinary feminine intelligence, she murmured softly 'Oh yes!' at the proper pauses, and looked at him with a thoughtful expression, as much as to say, 'How wise you are!'

'I really think I have realized my expectations,' Carew would say to himself; 'six months of my training, and she will be as perfect as a woman can be! My mother may not be so favourably impressed with her though, but I don't believe women can ever judge one another fairly—they are always prejudiced.'

The experimentalist in feminine education for the duties of a wife was profoundly convinced that he had found the help-mate for him, and, being somewhat of a *bon vivant*, did not forget to give her a little instruction in the art of cookery, in which branch of chemistry Miss Louisa took much more interest than in his prosaic lectures. It may be remarked here, that Louisa Page at this epoch fancied that she loved Carew in reality. When she wrote a little note to him during his temporary absence, she imagined she was, as she signed herself, his 'most sincerely.'

The cold weather had only just come to an end, the early mornings and evenings were still pleasantly cool and enjoyable for riding and driving, and Carew, who had archæological tastes, expressed a wish to explore thoroughly all the objects of interest in the neighbourhood of Delhi. Therefore, Miss Page had no difficulty in forming a party to go into tents, consisting of her father, herself, Captain Maunders, Ensign Burke, Mr. Carew, and a young officer of artillery named Willoughby. Their first encampment was to be pitched at Budlee-ka-Serai, about six miles from Delhi.

At this place, Carew, though wholly ignorant of the idiosyncrasies of Indian life, showed his master spirit. He advised how the horses were to be tethered by an improved process, in what order the tents were to be pitched, how the furniture should be arranged, and, lastly, where Louisa was to place her embroidery-frame. The young lady agreed with the greatest sweetness to all his suggestions, and murmured, 'Oh, thank you!' while she looked at him admiringly with her puzzling gray eyes. Louisa liked being in tents; she

really enjoyed the country air, the unconventional existence, and that nameless charm which nearly all people feel while living in camp. Moreover, she congratulated herself upon her timely retreat from Meerut and Delhi, because Wake could not persecute her; Florence Rawley would not be jealous of her, for, as she philosophically reasoned, 'what the eye does not see the heart does not feel,' and it would be supposed also that Burke had returned to his regiment; and, lastly, now as she had left Delhi, Mrs. Whitby would be less inclined to put into execution her threats of exposing her.

As Miss Page sat, like Abraham of old, at the door of the tent, in the cool of the evening, she was transfixed with astonishment on seeing that exactly opposite to her a large camp was being erected. Some people had arrived, and she discovered from the servants who were pitching the tents that the intruder was no other than Wake himself, and she feared, judging from the largeness of his establishment, that his sister, Mrs. Whitby, and Florence Rawley had pursued her to her sylvan retreat.

Louisa passed a very bad quarter of an hour in fear and perplexity, when she saw a horseman approaching, and then Wake himself rode up to her tent. After dismounting, he said:

'Louisa, it is quite by accident that I find you here; though I knew you had left Delhi, I had no idea where you were gone. Are you alone?'

'Yes,' she said, rather sulkily.

'Then let me speak to you.'

They entered the tent, and she asked:

'Is that sister of yours with you?'

He answered:

'No; Mrs. Whitby is at Delhi. Neither she nor her husband know anything about my movements.'

'Have you quarrelled with them, then?'

'No; but I have had a difference of opinion.'

'Oh!' she laughed; 'that is a nice distinction. I suppose it means you have had a jolly good row?'

'No; I have had no open dispute, but their ideas and mine do not agree about that treasure. I have brought these carts and camels to carry it away. Secro is only another long day's march from here. Will you come with me to that

place and help to dispose of the spoil? You may have the greater portion of it, for without my wife I do not want riches.'

Louisa's gray eyes glittered with avarice, for she dearly loved money, and all that money could buy.

'You are as foolishly unpractical as ever, I can see,' she laughed. 'Do you mean to say you would give me *your* money?'

'Of course. I never would have gone treasure-hunting, except in the hope of pleasing you.'

'Well,' she answered, deciding rapidly, 'I must have half, and I shall choose which half I like.'

'You shall have half. Listen to what my scheme is. I propose that you and your visitors move your camp to Secro, which will baffle investigation. A large shooting-party being at Secro will not appear singular to the natives, but a solitary man would be certain to excite suspicion. You, with the means at your disposal, can easily carry off the spoil. Your old servant, Golaub Sing, who has been so long with your father, can be trusted to do the thing secretly. I will go alone, night by night, and bring you all I find; and you have wit enough to get it conveyed to Delhi. Morgan, the banker, can put some of the valuables in his strong-room. Some of them I can take, and the rest must go to Meerut. With your co-operation we can elude prying inquirers, and it will be safer not to put all our eggs into one basket.'

'It sounds very fine,' said Louisa, who was vastly tempted to possess wealth.

'If we had not been so desperately poor,' he said, 'I think we might not have quarrelled so much; but we found to our cost, that "when Poverty comes in at the door, Love flies out at the window."'

'Because I take your money, it does not follow that we are to be friends altogether,' said Louisa, 'though if we really get this treasure it would make a great difference. After all, Mr. Carew is very plain and prosy, and I must say, since you have become an officer, you really look a handsome man. You were simply hideous in a private's dress.'

Wake, in his usual impulsive manner, had placed his arm round her waist, and, before she could resist, kissed her over and over again, saying, 'You never would believe how much I care for you!'

She struggled herself free. 'Nonsense, Harry; you crush my collar! You always were such a savage. I wish Carew would educate you instead of me—I don't require it. My father will soon be coming in, and he is at present no friend of yours, so that you had better not stay much longer. I must get him to consent to receive you. If it is all right with the governor, I will send you a note. Maunders and Burke, of the 200th, and young Willoughby, are out shooting with Mr. Carew, who is a cousin of Burke's, you know.'

At these names the legitimate lord of Louisa's charms looked black.

'Don't be a fool, and put on those jealous airs. If you are going to make yourself a nuisance, I won't be friends with you at all. You ought to be glad that men admire me. It wouldn't say much for your taste if they didn't. The officers of the 200th are all very well, but it's only a "grabby" regiment after all, and I like the cavalry best. The 10th Hussars were very nice, and were all men with money. I don't believe there's a fellow in the 200th who has got more than two hundred a year besides his pay. They are barely worth cultivating.'

'That's all very well,' said Wake disconsolately; 'but what right has Carew to talk about educating you? I told you to drop him.'

'Nonsense! he is a mere book in breeches!'

And Louisa, who was a clever mimic, then began, in a pompous and pedantic manner, with a peculiar thickness of intonation, to declaim in imitation of the squire:

'Evolutionists deduce man's descent from the ape. His physical conformation appears to be an advance upon, rather than a contrast to, the structure of the highest monkey. It is difficult to discern anything in his mental constitution which can be cited as displaying marked differences from the apparent ape-mind. Greed, cunning, and gregariousness may be predicated of both human and simial species. There is no reason for supposing that the courage, energy, and philanthropy which characterize man are not to be perceived in some degree of development amongst his tailed cousins.'

Wake laughed at her absurd mimicry; but just then the distant sound of horses' feet announced the approach of some new arrivals, and put an end to their merriment.

'Go! go!' cried the girl. 'It must be those men coming back from shooting. I will send and invite you to dinner if I can, provided you promise not to make a fool of me or of yourself by your stupid jealousy. Will you promise?'

'Yes,' he said, 'I will.'

About two hours later, Henry Wake received the expected summons to dinner, and soon after entered Major Page's brightly lighted dining-tent, which also was the general sitting-room of the party.

It was rather an awkward moment for most of the company assembled. Wake met his former officers for the first time as a social equal; and when the Major had last seen him, there had been a stormy scene between them!

Maunders and Burke looked very smart and soldierly in white trousers and red mess-jackets. Willoughby, a pale youth, with a pensive but intellectual face, wore the blue undress of his corps. Mr. Carew's portly person was arrayed in evening dress, while the Major kept Wake in countenance by being attired in travelling costume.

His host received the new guest with a vacant air, as if he had never known him before.

'So you have joined the army,' he said to Wake. 'Eh?—ah!—good. Yes, all this points to the battle of Armageddon.'

Then he shook his head mournfully, and went away, muttering something about 'the downfall of the great beast.'

They seated themselves at the table, which was prettily decorated with flowers, and, though they were 'in tents,' bright lights, glittering silver, a handsome dinner-service, and snowy damask exhibited that curious mixture of Asiatic and European luxury peculiar to Anglo-Indian life. The dinner was served, and they were waited upon by several stately Mahomedans costumed in snowy white, their heads swathed in the indispensable turban. The conversation soon became very lively, for they all spoke at once, although Louisa, with great tact, addressed her remarks mostly to Captain Maunders. She chaffed him about his Colonel's daughter, accusing him of being 'spoony' on the fair Florence.

The elderly Captain replied:

'She has made tremendous havoc amongst the hearts of the youngsters, but, by Gad! Miss Page, I have lost mine so often, and in so many places, during the twenty odd years

I've had the honour of serving her Majesty, and always found it again so easily, that it has grown tired of straying. Burke, there, was captivated, though, I fancy—in fact, I never quite knew whether they were engaged or not. By-the-bye, there's no reason why they should not be so now. Here they are, in the same station, and I have seen him at the side of the Colonel's carriage in the Mall often.'

'No, no,' said the Ensign, blushing slightly 'Glory is the only mistress I serve now, and I have deserted the gem-bedecked shrine of Venus for the blood-red altar of Mars.'

'D'yer hear him?' said the Captain. 'Gad! we have got a poet among us at last. The fellow speaks like a book. By Jove, sir!' he continued, addressing the Ensign, 'I thought of glory myself once, but, by the time you have worn a red coat as long as I have, you'll regard it as vanity and vexation of spirit, not to mention large sums of money lodged at the Agents' for promotion. No, no; glory is all humbug. I'd rather be a live donkey than a dead lion.'

'Have you seen much service, Captain Maunders?' asked Louisa.

'I've served her Majesty for twenty-three years, madam,' answered the Captain, 'but I've never been in action, if that's what you mean. By-the-bye, I was once in a good imitation of a battle.'

'Oh, what was that?' cried Louisa. 'Do tell us.'

'Well, Miss Page, it happened, several years ago, that my regiment was quartered at a large sea-port and garrison in the West of England. The Commandant was Sir Thomas Overbury, a great soldier, whose proud and martial spirit chafed considerably at the long duration of the peace which the rest of the inhabitants of Europe enjoyed. Being debarred from manifesting his warlike ardour in the field, he determined to indulge it by a sham battle, and, as he only had four or five regiments of infantry and a few artillery under his command, and thought his little armies would be incomplete without cavalry, he issued a general order that such of the officers of the garrison as liked might be mounted, and act as a body of horse, for that day only.

'Accordingly, the young scamps in the various regiments, who wanted a bit of fun, and were not required to do duty with their corps, got hold of all the available horseflesh in the place, and turned out as cavalry on the appointed day—and

a queer lot they looked, too, mounted as they were on every variety of unmanageable screw. However, the General inspected them with much apparent satisfaction, and proceeded to business, forming squares, and deploying into line, and blazing away with blank cartridges, till nothing could be seen but the bayonets glistening through the smoke, and the cavalry galloping about wildly in all directions like erratic comets. At last the fellows got so excited that they charged the infantry, and began to cut at them with their swords. The soldiers returned this by pricking the horses with their bayonets, which resulted in a complete rout of the cavalry, who fled in dismay, leaving several of their number on the field, upset by kicking horses.'

"'Charge!" shouted the General, riding furiously at our line, and waving his plumed hat in the air enthusiastically as he saw the day was won. "Line will advance!" cried our Colonel; "quick march, double!" and away we went in a cloud of smoke, right over the British public, who had assembled to witness the spectacle, and I, who had preferred to seek glory on foot, tumbled into an old woman's apple-basket as I was gallantly leading on my company to victory, and was violently assaulted by her for destroying her property; and by the time I had recovered my feet and my senses, the regiment was about a mile off, and I had been returned among the killed and wounded. That's the only action I was ever in. It was called the Battle of Horsley-down.'

'What fun it must have been!' said Louisa, as soon as the laughter occasioned by the dry humorous manner of the narrator had subsided.

When the meal was finished, Louisa left the tent and went into the cool balmy air outside, while an argument between the gentlemen, as to whether it was correct to light a cheroot at the large or small end, was being carried on. Wake followed her unobserved, and they were soon lost in the darkness of the open country. The other men, on coming out, were not particularly pleased at the desertion of their hostess. Wake made good use of the time Louisa and he were alone. He informed his female accomplice that they must march to Secro with as little delay as possible, and he would go on before and await them at the new camping-ground.

Oh, the men will come quick enough if you ask them,' said Louisa; 'they have had very bad sport—only an antelope, two teal, and a brace of peafowl. Carew shot a snake and a pair of paddy-birds; he has preserved the reptile in spirits, but he wanted to eat the birds—the nasty fellow. So we can easily get them to move to Secro by assuring them of better sport there.'

'All right,' said Wake; 'then I will invite them; and there is absolutely a man-eating tiger in that district. When I have made our treasure safe I should like to have a shot at the brute myself.'

'We had better have our camps a little apart, though,' said Louisa. 'Carew is always going about looking at everything, and no one knows what he might discover if he had the chance. I should not like to have to give him any of the spoil to keep him quiet.'

'I hate the fellow,' said Wake savagely. 'Why don't you get rid of him?'

'Oh! I hope to make him useful, and then I will give him his *jawab*!'

CHAPTER XIV.

TO SECRO.

A FEW days later, at sunrise, the encampment at Budlee-ka-Serai presented a very animated appearance. Miss Page and her escort had accepted the invitation given by Henry Wake, and were moving on to Secro, where they were to partake of his hospitality. The tent-poles had all been taken down, the furniture, the utensils, china, and glass, with the personal luggage of the party, had been packed upon a dozen bullock-carts, while a long string of camels were waiting to carry the tents.

It was a gloriously fresh morning, the sky above of that most cloudless blue such as is only to be seen to perfection in Italy or India. The air was deliciously cool, and the thickets and groves near at hand resounded with the early orisons of the newly awakened birds. What added to the picturesqueness of the scene was the great arched Serai close at hand. Beyond it were the once lordly and celebrated Shalimar gardens, where still are to be seen the artificial

lakes and canals, with occasional pleasure-houses, all of which belonged to one of the summer-palaces of the Kings of Delhi in the days of their splendour. It was from these gardens, now silent and deserted, that Lalla Rookh had started for her world-renowned journey to Cashmere.

Louisa Page, dressed in a white linen riding habit, Maunders, Burke, and Willoughby in breeches and riding-boots, were drinking hot coffee, preparatory to their twenty-miles ride. Carew was assisting Major Page to despatch the 'paraphameliar,' as the Major called it. The squire was attired in a grotesque brown-holland suit, with tightly-strapped trousers, and a broad-brimmed hat with a high-peaked crown, to which was attached a green veil, while his eyes were shaded by blue goggles, his 'get-up' eliciting the remark from an unsophisticated coolie: 'There are many devils—but there is no devil like a Frank in a tall hat.' Then, pointing to the erudite Carew, the village Solon could not resist the opportunity of improving the occasion to his friends. 'My brothers,' he said, 'if you drink wine, eat beef, and despise the gods, you will become like that!'

The horses, ready saddled, were being held by the grooms. Miss Page and her detachment of the service started, and trotted down the Kurnaul road, leaving the jabbering crowd of servants and coolies to the tender mercies of Carew, who gave polite but emphatic orders in forcible English. The misfortune was, that hardly anyone understood a word he said, and those who imagined they did, always succeeded in doing the very opposite to what he required. Philosopher as he was, theoretically, the luckless squire became physically heated, irascible, and lastly furious.

'These niggers would try the patience of a saint,' he ejaculated.

'Leave it to Golaub Sing, Carew,' said the Major. 'I never keep a dog and bark myself,' and in pursuance of his policy of 'masterly inactivity,' he stretched himself in a palankeen, and waited until Fate presented four men to carry him away. But there is an end to all things on earth, and the procession of carts, camels, and servants started at last, led by Carew, mounted on a camel, and protecting himself from the rays of the sun with a large white umbrella.

The equestrians had the best of it. They cantered along the soft side of the road until they drew rein to rest their

horses; and then Miss Page's escort began to chaff her about Secro, and inquired for what mysterious reason *she* so particularly wanted to go there.

'Why won't you believe that it's to find the man-eating tiger?' she retorted.

'Suppose that tiger appeared now, what on earth should we do?' asked Burke.

'Oh, I should expect one of you gentlemen to shoot him,' returned Louisa.

'We would try to fulfil your expectation,' he said, 'or perish in the attempt; although we have no guns.'

'I am not a bigger coward than most men,' said Willoughby, 'but I think it is foolhardy to track a tiger on horseback. If we mean business we shall require elephants.'

'Mr. Carew is dying to kill a tiger,' said Louisa.

The men laughed.

'*He* kill a tiger,' said Maunders. 'The worst shot I ever saw in my life; he never succeeds in firing his gun until the game has disappeared.'

'If we get "*khobar*" of a tiger we won't let Carew know,' said Burke. 'He would spoil sport. I should have to protect *him*; and oh!' he cried with enthusiasm, 'I should die happy if I only *could* kill a tiger.'

'How ill-natured you are! You men are always selfish. I will go with poor Carew and shoot the tiger,' Louisa exclaimed gushingly.

'Oh!' exclaimed her companions, 'we could never allow that.'

'I cannot understand,' said Burke, 'why on earth that harum-scarum Wake has gone to Secro. He must find an ensign's pay more elastic than I do, if he can invite ladies and gentlemen by the half-dozen to visit him. Devil a bit could I do it,' laughed the Irishman.

'His friends in England,' said Louisa, 'gave him five hundred pounds to join his new regiment, and he is getting rid of it as fast as he can.'

'Who *is* Wake?' asked Willoughby.

'The other day he was only a private in my company,' said Maunders, 'and now he is an ensign, having bought a commission, and he has been gazetted to the Tipperary Rangers.'

He is here on sick leave,' added Burke, 'which will soon

be complicated with disease of the chest, for five hundred pounds won't go far. He is starting not like an ensign, but as a full-blown field-marshal. To my knowledge he has bought two splendid Arabs, some country-breds, and an elephant. He'll come to grief again. He had to enlist because he had outrun the constable, I heard.'

'How Mr. Wake will pay his bills is no affair of ours,' said Louisa coldly; 'but I hope he has a good cook, for I shall be frightfully hungry when we arrive at Secro.'

'To say nothing of being thirsty.' added Maunders. 'It is to be hoped the fellow has not forgotten to get in the beer and the soda-and-B.'

'There is a dâk bungalow within reach, if the commissariat proves weak,' said Louisa.

The riders left the highway and went upon a rough country road, such as are the only means of communication in India between small and scattered villages; and when the path was impracticable on account of the deep ruts made by the bullock-carts, it was very easy for them to ride across the waste uncultivated land. The country was barren and slightly undulating, while the soil was poor and stony. Here and there, at the distance of several miles, stood some ruinous hamlets, surrounded by crumbling walls. Occasionally, seemingly rising out of a rice-field, some magnificent relic of long past splendour would appear, such as a great domed, minareted mosque, or mausoleum, so solidly built that it stood massive and erect after five centuries of neglect. Then, by the roadside they passed graveyard after graveyard full of still respected tombs, where the Moslems for hundreds of years had lain their dead. The ruins, the silence, the untilled soil, the absence of sound or sight of inhabitant, might have been depressing, but little affected these light-hearted travellers. Even Captain Maunders forgot to grumble, and as for the others, they had 'youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm.'

'There is Wake!' they exclaimed, as a figure was seen riding to meet them across the dreary moorland. He was mounted upon a spirited white Arab, which he rode with easy grace, and as he drew near his face lighted up pleasantly on seeing Louisa.

He drew his horse to the side of hers, and placed his hand rather familiarly upon the pommel of her saddle. She

drew herself up with a pettish gesture, and moved her steed away from him.

‘Have you seen the tiger yet, Mr. Wake?’ she asked, in a matter-of-fact manner.

‘No; but a few nights ago he carried off an old man about twenty miles from here. Several hunters have been after him, but he is too wary for them, and has got away.’

‘Oh! but we must get hold of him somehow,’ said Burke. ‘Is there anything else here to shoot?’

‘Oh, there are plenty of deer, and there are teal and snipe in a great jheel to the west of Secro. Shall I show you a short cut to my tents?’

The riders left the small semblance of pathway they had been following, and went off helter-skelter, down nullahs and up on the other side, here jumping over an irrigating channel, and there riding at a hard gallop over some dead level plain, and thus soon arrived at Wake’s camp.

At the foot of the Castle of Secro there was a now utterly ruined but once fortified town, and near this mass of desolation could be seen the cheerful sight of the white tents of the encampment. On their arrival Wake invited them into his largest tent, where a substantial meal and plenty of mighty potations awaited them. The visitors ate, drank, and laughed, and were in the wildest spirits, exhilarated by their long ride.

‘My father, Carew, and the baggage will turn up sooner or later,’ said Louisa. ‘It is a long march, and they will probably not be in until sunset. We had a haunting dread that the servants would go the wrong way, which would be awkward, so father thought it better to keep an eye upon them, and Carew, whom Nature seems to have intended for a Quartermaster-General, is showing them the way by maps of the road.’

‘Well! that’s serious,’ said Maunders. ‘If Carew is the guide, I foresee that I shall have to sleep on the hard ground under the light of the stars, and, after so many years’ service, my constitution is not adapted for that sort of thing.’

‘We will sit round a camp-fire and tell ghost stories,’ said Willoughby

Wake managed to say to Louisa unobserved, ‘It is all right hitherto; the treasure is untouched. I have brought

away a good deal, and have concealed some of it underneath the floor of my tent; but some natives have come into the neighbourhood. They are gipsies, or affect to be so, but I cannot help fearing they may be in communication with the Thugs, for I am almost sure that I saw in their company that horrible old woman who started from Meerut with me, and I believe she is an accomplice of those murderers. I think I shall play a bold game, and order them off, as if I had authority to do so from the magistrate of Delhi. One must play the game of "brag" sometimes. There is little doubt that these gipsies are thieves; so I am glad you have come up in full force; we have now so many guns that we should be a match for them. They might try to rob, and even murder, a single individual, but they dare not attack numbers. Still, I'll send off what spoil I have collected at once, and make sure of it.'

They rested for some time during the heat of the afternoon, and towards sunset wandered out to explore the neighbourhood in which they found themselves. Louisa, still attired in her habit, led the party to the ruins; her tall and well-developed figure looked particularly well in the severe simplicity of her equestrian garb. As she held up her long skirt, and tripped over the fallen stones, she exhibited the most dainty foot, beautifully shod in neat riding-boots. Louisa was always picturesque, and by some subtlety whatever she wore always seemed to her admirers to be the dress in which she looked the most fascinating. She was not an enthusiastic admirer of the ruinous or the beautiful in architecture; had she been so, she must have appreciated the gloomy crumbling fortress of Secro, resembling a feudal castle of the Middle Ages. There still remained a bridge over what had once been a moat; there also stood the lofty arched gateway flanked by two round towers. This entrance, more correctly speaking, was the city gate of what once was a fortified place, while the castle of Secro itself had been the inner defence or citadel. Here Mogul or Pathan had ruled as the dominant power over the subject Hindoo population for some seven hundred years. Antiquaries might know when or how this stronghold had been overthrown, but the ravages of men had exceeded those of time, as many generations had used the fine cut stone of the place to erect other buildings. Still, the wreck

that remained could not fail to excite enthusiasm for a race of architects who 'planned like giants, and finished like jewellers.'

It was Wake who held Louisa's hand, and assisted her over the rough places, and up the incline that led to the courtyard of the castle. Willoughby, carefully scanning the place with a soldier's eye, remarked, 'The Mahomedans must have been very much afraid of the Hindoos, to have built these strong places to coerce the people whom they had conquered.'

Maunders' progression up the steep incline was hindered by the stoutness and shortness of breath of middle age, while Burke ostentatiously kept aloof, disgusted with the sudden intimacy and evident good understanding existing between Louisa and the late 'ranker.' In a fit of pique he now bitterly regretted that he had more than once got him off, at the orderly-room and elsewhere. He said to himself, 'What a cheeky beggar Wake is! I wish the Colonel had taken him down a few pegs when he had the chance. I think he must have known Miss Page in England.'

Wake did the honours of his ruins with consummate address. He conducted the party up the winding stairs of the tower, he expatiated on the beauty of the view, and gave his lady companion a confidential little sign as they passed the all-important heap of stones near the well. Maunders and Burke could not help observing that Louisa was intensely excited and strangely interested in this dreary place, and that neither she nor Wake were easily persuaded to abandon their antiquarian researches when the non-admiring portion of the party wished to return to the camp. Maunders, panting from his violent exertions, said to the two subalterns, 'Gad! I am tired of playing gooseberry to those young folks. Miss Page adores ruins, does she? Not human ones, though. She takes care to pick out the best-looking young fellows she can. She has not addressed one word to me since we came here.' Nor was Maunders better pleased when the offending couple descended from the rampart walls, and in following their lead, and while avoiding an alarming and gliding snake, the stout Captain fell into a miry bog, from whence he was extricated by Burke and Willoughby, not without difficulty.

When it became dusk the explorers returned to Wake's

tents, where dinner awaited them. The viands provided were again excellent; and the iced champagne, undeniable in quality, greatly tended to soothe Maunders' ruffled temper. Everyone was very gay, but as it grew late, a sort of anxiety took possession of them. Where was Carew and the 'paraphameliar'? If they did not turn up soon, how on earth should they all manage to sleep? Maunders grumbled and growled, asserting that if he slept upon mother earth it would bring on his gout. The younger men thought lightly of the predicament, and expressed no sympathy for him.

It was a splendid night, bright as an English noonday, and under the moonbeams they wandered here and there, Miss Page distributing her amiable remarks freely and equally. In the deep azure star-lit heavens, flocks of wild geese could be distinctly seen and heard, as they flew overhead northwards to cooler lands. The jackals, emerging from the ruins, filled the air with their unearthly wailings: 'Where, where? Here, here! A dead Hindoo! A dead Hindoo!' as generations of Anglo-Indians have parodied their hideous outeries.

The servants had made large fires both to keep themselves warm and to scare away possible wolves and leopards, who, after all, were unlikely to venture near the sound of their endless chattering tongues.

A shout of joy! Yes! Undoubtedly the tents and baggage had arrived at last; and better late than never, for it was now long past midnight. Major Page's palky was the first object to appear; he was the forerunner of the party.

'How late you are, father!' said Louisa. 'We were getting quite nervous about you.'

'Yes, and you had good cause, if you knew all. Carew was more than half way to Kurnaul before he found that his much-vaunted map of the road was all wrong, and then his brute of a camel ran away. He held on like grim death, but he was out of sight and sound for some hours; but by the sagacity of his camel, who objected to solitude, he was ultimately restored to us, shaken to death, breathless and speechless. He's behind; he is coming in all right. *Peg lao!*' shouted the exhausted but strictly sober Major. 'I have had nothing to drink for hours.'

After several bumpers the old man began to broach his favourite topic of the White Horse and the opening of the

Seventh Seal; but as no one heeded him, he soon held his peace. By this time Carew had thankfully alighted from his lofty perch. 'That brute has the action of a camp-stool,' he said. 'There is not an inch of my body that does not ache. Oh! oh! ugh! ugh!' he groaned, as he limped ruefully into Wake's tent; but, after drinking a generous supply of champagne, with vast heroism, he issued forth, leaning on Burke's arm, to select the spot where Major Page's camp should be erected.

Then the tired servants nearly mutinied, because, with the object of gaining a fine view, Carew fixed upon a place within a stone's throw of the ruins of Secro! This was too much for the mild Hindoo!

'Those ruins were well-known to be haunted! They were full of ghosts! Let heaven preserve them! It was an accursed spot! In it there were wild beasts and snakes, to say nothing of robbers! Might Providence preserve them all! For their part, they would move as far from Secro as they could, and pitch their tents in the open plain!'

'I am glad they *are* so superstitious,' whispered Wake to Louisa. 'It would have been awkward for us to have had them so near; that inquisitive meddling idiot Carew could watch us closely.'

'Idiot!' cried the girl. 'He is a very clever man, and his inquisitiveness is only a love of information. There's more wit in his little finger than in your whole body.'

It was two o'clock before all the tents were erected and all the beds ready; but before that time many a song was sung over the camp fire, each one with the invariable chorus of 'Rule Britannia!'

CHAPTER XV.

WITCHCRAFT.

WAKE, although, unfortunately, of a jealous disposition, was so engrossed with finding, concealing, and despatching the treasure of Secro, that he was too preoccupied to observe, or be annoyed at, the lover-like attentions of the infatuated Carew; for Louisa had renewed her terms of more than friendly intimacy with the squire.

Miss Page and her party had been out on an expedition to examine some old buildings which were in the neighbour-

hood. They were returning over the desolate country back to the camp, Carew and Louisa riding side by side, and had lost sight of their companions, who had gone off the road after a flight of sand-grouse.

It was a glorious evening, with a splendid sunset of gold and crimson which would have charmed the heart of a Turner.

‘I am so happy,’ at length murmured Louisa softly.

‘Are you?’ asked Carew. ‘Why?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Because it is such a beautiful evening?’

‘Yes; and because——’ and she stopped.

‘Tell me the second because.’

She hesitated, and then added deliberately: ‘Because I am with you!’

Carew’s heart beat rapidly, and he felt greatly agitated. She had turned her face towards him. She was pale, and her eyes seemed soft and love-lit; and he thought he had never seen so fair a creature. Their horses were walking at the slowest pace, their faces were in dangerous proximity: the squire could not resist the temptation of imprinting a kiss upon her warm, red lips, and she did not appear to be angry. On a former occasion she had bid him hope, and Carew, though eccentric, was a loyal, honest gentleman. He loved this fair witch wholly and passionately; he would have died for her, or, what was possibly harder, he would have lived to do her service.

Louisa could not understand this nobility of character, but, shallow and unscrupulous as she was, still Carew had inspired a feeling she had hitherto entertained for no other man—she respected him. His multifarious information on so many subjects interested her. There was something about him utterly different from the chaffy flirting and scandal of regimental life. Then the young squire was rich, had a fine estate and good position, and Louisa was ambitious, and—more than all—she knew she could manage him, and life presented many more agreeable objects with such a cultivated and gentle companion, than that spent in the company of the reckless and violent Wake, whom she feared far more than she loved.

At this juncture it is impossible to say what the squire would have further asked, or what she would have promised,

for they suddenly drew rein to listen to some strange sounds which, all at once, broke the stillness of the country.

‘Is that the cry of a wild animal?’ asked Louisa.

They listened again. This time a shrill, despairing shriek was borne to them by the wind. Following this came the hoarse murmur of many voices, as of people in anger, but above the deeper roar were repeatedly heard the piercing agonising cries of a human being seemingly in extremity.

Carew, without a moment’s reflection, rode off to a thick clump of trees by the side of the road—the spot whence the clamour and screams seemed to proceed. Louisa followed more deliberately, and on arriving she saw Carew surrounded by a number of infuriated villagers.

He was speaking loudly and authoritatively in English, they equally excitedly in their own tongue. The object of dispute was a singular one. A very minute human figure, almost resembling an ape, was suspended to a high tree by a rope, which was tied round its middle. The clothing of this wretched creature consisted only of a few rags, while a quantity of long gray hair hung from its head. The rope had been thrown over the topmost branch of the tall tree, and a powerful peasant was pulling the suspended form up and down. To add to the tortures of this miserable being, every time the body reached the ground, some inhuman wretches attacked it with sticks and stones, and elicited those terrible cries and groans which had been heard by Carew and Louisa.

Miss Page spoke Hindostani well, and Carew knew this.

‘They do not understand me,’ he said; ‘find out what they are doing.’

Miss Page calmly asked:

‘Who is the headman of this village?’

The ‘lumbadar’ appeared.

‘What are you doing?’ Louisa asked angrily. ‘Would you commit murder? I shall report you to the Government, and everyone of you will be hanged.’

The headman, with many ‘your honours’ and ‘your graces,’ answered that they were performing a good action, for they were taking vengeance on a malignant witch, the ‘Witch of Megara,’ who, by her diabolical arts, had caused a man-eating tiger to infest their neighbourhood, and carry off and devour their people.

Carew, comprehending by this time that an old woman was being tortured, dismounted, and throwing the reins of his horse to Miss Page, rushed at the rustic who held the rope. The man started back in dismay, and, letting go his hold of the rope, the wretched old creature fell on the ground at Carew's feet. He stood over her prostrate form in a defiant manner, and his flashing eyes and angry countenance made the mob retreat a little. They had been ready enough to try issues with a feeble old woman, but stood terror-stricken before the angry glances of the furious sahib—one of the master race.

'Go back to your homes,' said Louisa commandingly.

The cowed villagers slunk sullenly away, with much unuttered indignation.

Carew, who had a fair knowledge of surgery, placed his finger on the withered black wrist of the old woman.

'She is still alive,' he said. 'What on earth shall we do with her?'

'The villagers will finish her, probably,' answered Louisa, 'or she may fall a prey to a hyena, who, according to the natives, always eat old women.'

'Oh!' said Carew, 'she is small and light enough, poor thing. I will take her on my horse.'

Louisa shuddered.

'But she is so dirty—a disgusting native!'

'She is a human being,' answered Carew. 'I could not reconcile it to my conscience to abandon a woman in such distress,' and he placed her before him on his horse.

Miss Page thought this quite in keeping with Carew's Quixotic character, therefore she said no more, but she carefully rode at a little distance from the Good Samaritan and his unsavoury burden.

It was quite dark when they neared their camp. The country being wholly deserted, they had hitherto escaped human observation, but now Miss Page began to remember *les convenances*.

'You had better drop the Witch of Megara outside our camp,' she said, 'and send the sweeper to pick her up. Our servants will think you have gone mad.'

But Carew rode boldly up to his own tent, and, having obtained a native camp-bed, called a 'charpoy,' he caused the witch to be laid upon it, and had her placed in a tent.

There Miss Page, not wholly lost to the helpful instincts of her sex, with the assistance of her ayah and some of her other servants, applied remedies to the deplorable-looking creature until she recovered consciousness. But Louisa did not awake the superstitious fears of the Asiatics by telling them of the suspicious character of the new arrival. Wake looked at the extraordinary visitor, and he whispered to Louisa :

‘I thought as much. I wish to goodness Carew had not brought her here. She is the old wretch who was in league with those murdering Thugs.’

‘Don’t say anything to awake suspicion,’ she answered; ‘pretend to know nothing about her.’

On recovering her mental faculties, the old woman announced that she was one of the ‘Faithful.’ This smoothed matters very much, many of the servants being also followers of the Prophet, therefore it was comparatively easy to excite their interest in an unfortunate co-religionist. In consequence, the old woman was well treated and well fed, and in a few days sufficiently recovered to join in the daily life of the camp, of which she soon became, if not the most prominent, certainly the most strikingly picturesque feature. Carew had purchased for her a warm shawl of brilliant red, with which she covered her head. Her thin and withered legs were tightly encased in bright green trousers, while the upper part of her person was covered with a wadded jacket of flowered chintz, and her tiny feet were shod with gold-embroidered shoes. A few blankets, a few brass utensils, an unlimited supply of simple food, and the old woman considered that she had found a terrestrial Paradise, which she exhibited no intention of leaving.

‘Go to my home!’ she said, with a shrill cackling laugh; ‘I have no home! I have had sons, and grandsons, but all are dead. It is my fate!’

Louisa, though naturally selfish, would laugh and talk with the wonderful old woman, if she met her, and, moreover, she acted as interpreter for Carew, who was always inquiring into her supernatural pretensions. The old woman would say of Carew that he in no respects resembled an infidel, but was like those good Mahomedans, not such as are found now, but of whom people read in books.

The old woman was an object of fear to Wake.

‘Horrid old creature!’ he would say; ‘I would not have her in my camp. Look out that she does not tell dacoits to come and rob us.’

So rooted was his dread of her, that he made a practice of sending off day by day, under some cleverly contrived pretext or other, all the treasure he had collected the previous night; not that he ever met the Witch of Megara, for the two camps were some little distance apart.

Carew always travelled with a cash-box well furnished with rupees, and a silver tea-service. The subject of thieves having been mooted, Major Page, (an experienced old Indian) informed him that the district in which they were encamped was inhabited by a tribe of robbers called Goojurs; but even if this were not so, attacks upon tents by armed thieves were not uncommon in any part of India, as it was easy to make a slit with a sharp knife in the canvas wall of the tent and get in that way. But Major Page had, of course, retained the services of a private watchman—one of the Goojur tribe—for their camp. This was generally considered protection enough, but nevertheless, for fear of accidents, the Major advised Carew to chain the trunks and boxes containing things of value to the pole of the tent, and that this expedient would effectually circumvent the robbers, although they were marvels of dexterity in their nefarious trade.

Willoughby and Captain Maunders’ leave had expired; and they now somewhat reluctantly returned to their respective stations, but the remainder of the party showed no intention of quitting their quarters for the present.

Burke and Carew shared the same tent, which, according to Indian custom, was dimly lighted by a small oil lamp, placed upon the floor, and kept burning all night. One night, after retiring as usual, Burke was suddenly awakened by the sound of stealthy movements in the tent. In his confused, half-awake state, he did not at first realize whether he was dreaming or not; but by the faint light he saw a tall, dark figure, almost like a shadow, noiselessly flitting about. Without a moment’s reflection, the athletic young man sprang from his bed, and threw himself upon the intruder, seizing him by the arm, only to find that he could not hold him; for the marauder was naked, and his dark skin so profusely oiled, that he slipped, snake-like,

from the grasp of Burke's detaining hand. Then the Irishman felt a sudden sharp pain in his side; he had been stabbed by a knife or dagger, which the thief wore fastened to his elbow.

Burke's angry exclamations and the noise of the struggle awoke Carew, who, seeing at a glance that Burke was getting the worst of the encounter, rushed to his assistance; but before he could reach the combatants, the robber had escaped through a slit which he had made in the tent wall. To pursue him was Carew's first thought, and he at once gave chase. Burke, although bleeding profusely, joined in the pursuit. A cry of 'Thieves! thieves!' was raised, and the whole camp was soon in an uproar. The man ran fleetly across the open plain, evidently making for the shelter of the ruins of Secro; for among its subterranean passages and gloomy irregular buildings, if he could only reach them, he hoped to find a safe refuge. Carew was a trained runner, and followed close at his heels. The chase became exciting. The marauder was nearing the moat of the ancient castle, and had reached the outskirts of Wake's camp. Another minute, and he would have got away; but, in trying to make a short cut, the dacoit's foot caught in one of the far-extending tent-ropes, and he was thrown headlong to the ground. The squire was so close to him that he actually fell over his prostrate form. The robber, who was terrified, knowing resistance was useless, began to raise a tremendous outcry. Burke now came up, and the two Englishmen secured the thief, who was both out of breath and trembling with fear.

'Wake! Wake!' they shouted, as they recognised, by the gleams of the moonlight, that they were close to his large double-poled tent, an ostentatiously magnificent abode for an ensign. But, no answer coming to their call for help, they, dragging their captive by main force, unceremoniously entered the tent, in order to obtain assistance either from Wake or his servants.

Some of the tent-pitchers and grooms of Major Page's camp were now on the scene, and Wake's own servants had also appeared, roused by the noise and alarm.

It was now between the hours of one and two o'clock, and Carew and Burke were surprised at the spectacle which greeted their eyes upon their abrupt entrance into Wake's

well-lighted bedroom. The tent was in great disorder; a quantity of property lay scattered about it on all sides, and over this had been hastily thrown blankets, sheets, and the coverings of the bed.

Carew and Burke at first hardly noticed the confusion, for there, in the tent, seated opposite to Henry Wake, was—Louisa Page! Their amazement at finding her, at the dead of night, alone with the ex-private, cannot be described. She, with woman's wit, grasped the situation at once, and addressed them calmly, although she was pale with fear.

'Why have you come here?' she asked.

Carew answered: 'This scoundrel broke into our tent to steal. We followed him here; but we little expected to see *you*, Miss Page, in Mr. Wake's camp.'

'I came to Mr. Wake for protection, finding there were thieves in our camp,' she answered.

Carew was too polite to say anything, but he vaguely wondered at Louisa's statement, and speculated on the speed with which she must have travelled from one camp to the other.

'Look at Desmond Burke,' Louisa exclaimed; 'he is covered with blood!'

'Oh, don't trouble about me, Miss Page,' said the Ensign icily; 'I am not much hurt.'

The excitement of chasing the robber had kept him up hitherto, but now he turned ghastly pale, and fell fainting on the floor. The criminal was dragged away by the servants, howling dismally, and everyone's attention was directed to Burke, who lay senseless on the ground with a crimson stream flowing from his side.

Wake, who had a sincere liking for the officer who had formerly so often good-naturedly befriended him, cried out:

'My God! he is dying! If we only had a doctor! Mr. Carew, I will leave him in your charge, and I will ride off at once to Delhi for a surgeon,' and a few minutes later Wake was galloping away on the road to the city as if he were riding for his life.

'Miss Page,' said Carew coldly, 'this is no place for you; let me advise your returning to your own tent. I believe I know enough of surgery to be able to stanch Burke's wound;' but as he leaned over the prostrate form he added, 'I fear the hurt is serious; that villain struck him a backward

blow.' Carew's eyes filled with tears. 'If Burke dies, I will have that fellow hanged as sure as I live!'

Louisa left the tent with a haughty air and flashing eyes, despite her sympathy and pity for the wounded man. There was a cool insolence in Carew's manner which expressed what he dared not put into words—that he was disgusted at discovering her in so compromising a situation, and that she had forfeited his esteem and respect for ever.

As Carew, with almost womanly gentleness, attended to his wounded companion, his reflections were very bitter. He knew that Louisa must have been closeted with Wake a considerable time before the alarm of thieves had been given; but up to that moment he had thought her an honourable and truthful, though a somewhat unconventional woman. But now he could not doubt the evidence of his own senses. 'She is a thorough "garrison hack,"' he thought. What a precious fool I have made of myself! How Burke, poor fellow! will laugh at the way in which my work has turned out of the mould, if he recovers, and we can talk this matter over together.' To the squire's loyal nature, treachery was incomprehensible. Louisa Page had been deceiving him from the outset with her pretty blandishments and caresses. He felt himself suddenly grown old and stupid, and thought that never again could he trust either man or woman.

CHAPTER XVI.

DISILLUSIONED.

CAREW passed a long night-vigil at his cousin's bedside. Sometimes the sick man dozed, sometimes he groaned with pain, and sometimes he talked feebly; while his clever and gentle nurse administered restoratives to him. Carew could not but know that the stab which Burke had received might end fatally, for it was a serious one. Would Desmond Burke die in the flower of his youth by the hand of an obscure assassin? What news to send to the old home in Tipperary! There were seven sons in Bally-na-slough, all six feet high, and all serving her Majesty; but this was the youngest, the Benjamin, the best-loved.

While his patient slept, Carew glanced about the tent, the

singular appearance of which, added to Louisa's presence there, could not but excite the curiosity of a person of his inquiring turn of mind. He moved a corner of the white sheet which covered one of the heaps which were lying on the floor; underneath he perceived several bundles tied up in the common black blankets of the country, such as are used by the natives. Projecting out of one of these he saw the finely-wrought handle of some metal utensil, apparently of copper. His knowledge of *bric-à-brac* told him that the workmanship on this vessel was antique, and the design rare. Despite his anxiety about Burke, he could not restrain the designs of a true curiosity-hunter, and in a moment more this work of art was in his hands. But he could not determine whether the article, which in shape resembled a ewer, was made of copper or brass; for in the dim light, and from age, it appeared black. Good heavens! could it be gold? But he would set this point at rest, for he carried in his pocket a small phial of aquafortis, which he used for testing the various articles of jewellery, etc., which he from time to time purchased in the various bazaars of India. He applied the test. Yes, there was no doubt of it. Ensign Wake was the happy man who not only held the first place in the affections of the peerless Louisa, but was the possessor of a most curious ewer. This discovery stimulated Carew to further examination: and under cover of some blankets he found some old leather chests filled with pieces of metal, in shape resembling small bricks, which the acid of his phial proved were also pure gold. Never was an Essex squire more perplexed. His rival was supposed to be a poor man, and yet he found him in the possession of riches worthy of the Great Mogul.

The night dragged its weary length along. Carew dared not, could not, sleep; for, besides the sudden discovery he had just made, there was the astounding disillusion with regard to Miss Page. He was disgusted with himself for having been so easily duped.

Ah! bitter experience! Never again would he trust or love any woman as he had loved her: and she had been so treacherous. Had she not bade him hope, only to deceive him? Had she not allowed him to kiss her dainty lips? Had she not in a thousand ways implied that she loved him and reciprocated his devotion? And he—he had been de-

ceived ; he had believed her to be as good as beautiful, only to find now that she was simply a worthless woman, without a shred of honour.

At eleven o'clock the next morning Wake returned, bringing with him the civil-surgeon of Delhi, a burly man, with a rough, honest voice. The new arrival hastily glanced round the strangely disordered tent, and then made his way to the bedside of the wounded man. After feeling his pulse carefully, he said in a low tone ;

'Great loss of blood, with symptoms of fever coming on. We must get him out of this, for the weather is getting hot, and canvas is but a poor protection from the sun. Has he any friends in Delhi to whom he could be sent at once ?'

'Yes,' said Wake ; 'my sister, Mrs. Whitby, would gladly take care of him.'

'Then,' said the doctor, with quick decision, 'he had better be removed immediately ; he can travel in my carriage, and I will see to him on the road.'

After examining the wound and replacing the bandages, the surgeon said that there was nothing more to be done, only to get the sick man into Delhi with as little delay as possible.

Carew, on hearing that his cousin was to be moved, at once volunteered to accompany him. He was very anxious on his account, but added to this, he was thankful for an excuse to leave Secro, which had become suddenly hateful to him. He felt an aversion to paying a visit to the Pages' camp, even to tell them of his contemplated departure ; and yet, after the extraordinary terms of intimacy to which he had been admitted by the Major and Miss Page, it would seem a marked, if not ungracious proceeding, if he left without a word of farewell. Still, the squire felt he did not wish to see Louisa again ; he had no desire to upbraid her with her duplicity—what was the good of his so doing ? He had been a fool, a blind fool ! Nothing could ever rehabilitate her in his good opinion. Never ! Never, so long as time should last, would he forgive her !

The servants were called and preparations rapidly made for the approaching journey of the sick man. Wake, who had started a fine stable, offered Carew a mount for the thirty miles ride into Delhi, which he gratefully accepted ; for he had been wondering how he should manage to perform the

journey. But, while thanking Wake with old-fashioned courtesy, Carew could not resist saying :

‘Are you aware that you have picked up a valuable work of art which is not only the purest gold, but of the most antique workmanship?’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Wake.

‘That *chef d’œuvre* of a jug which I saw in your tent.’

‘Oh!’ said Wake, trying to appear unconcerned; ‘a common bazaar thing; I picked it up for a few annas.’

‘Indeed!’ said Carew. ‘I will willingly give you a few rupees for your bargain, if you care to part with it.’

‘No,’ said Wake, somewhat shortly; ‘I have a long march before me, and shall require all my chattels.’

In common politeness Carew could say no more, but he thought if every ensign in India carried such an amount of valuable property about with him, what a singular place it must be, and what luxury Englishmen affected.

When all was ready, the doctor gave the word for the little party to set off; and no sooner had they disappeared, than Louisa rushed into Wake’s tent in a state of excitement, while Wake himself certainly was in no very amiable mood.

‘What did the doctor say about Burke?’ she asked.

‘He said it’s a nasty wound, but he has every hope that Burke will, with good nursing, recover.’

‘Carew went without even coming to say good-bye,’ she remarked pettishly; ‘he will talk about this, and my reputation will be ruined.’

‘Worse than that,’ said Wake. ‘The prying fool has been poking his nose everywhere, and has found out the treasure. Luckily there is not much more to bring away, and the only thing that can be done is for you to start from here as soon as you can, and take all I have with you; and then, if he sets the police on me, there will be nothing compromising to be found.’

‘Where can I put it?’ asked Louisa.

‘When I was in Delhi,’ he answered, ‘I saw a house at the back of the Ridge, which is to let. It is called the Red House, and has long been empty, because it is said to be haunted. On looking over it, I discovered it to be an old ramshackle place, with several underground rooms, which would suit to conceal the things in. So I took the place in your father’s name, paying a month’s rent in advance to the

native in charge. You must manage to stay there for a time, living camp fashion ; at all events, until we have disposed of the property, of which I shall be very glad to be rid, for I have never had so much worry and bother in my life as since I have found that treasure.'

'Now that all of the men have gone, it would be horribly dull here,' said Louisa, 'so we may as well go as soon as we can get carts and camels. I am sick of Secro ! Heaven knows I never wish to see it again !'

The carriage containing Burke and his medical attendant drew up at the door of the Whitbys' residence. The ladies of the house had been previously informed by Wake of the accident, but were hardly prepared to see Burke so soon or in so pitiable a condition. It grieved them to behold the wounded man, looking as pale as a corpse, being carried into the house by Carew, the doctor, and some of the servants. He was placed on a couch in the drawing-room ; and Florence, coming in and perceiving his pallid features and his state of semi-consciousness, could not withhold her tears. All resentment faded from her gentle heart ; all unkind feeling was merged into intense anxiety for his life.

'Oh ! Dr. Ingledew !' she cried ; 'he will not die ! He must recover !'

'We will hope so, my dear young lady,' the doctor answered. 'He has youth and a good constitution on his side.'

The women, with the tender devotedness of their sex, did all that thought and kindness could prompt for Burke's welfare, and after three days he was sufficiently recovered to hold the following conversation with Florence, who was taking her turn as sick-nurse by his side. Claspings the small rosy fingers of the young girl in his hand as she stood beside his couch, he said :

'No, Florrie ; indeed it was a mistake. I always loved you best ; and as for Louisa, I do not think much of her. There are some things no fellow can understand. I cannot make out why she tried to entrap me, or where that Wake got all those gold things from.'

'What gold things ?' said the girl, blushing. 'Do you mean a bracelet ?'

The young man looked at her.

'Has Wake got a bracelet of yours ?' he asked.

‘No—yes—that is, I once lent—no, gave it him. But I will tell you all about it some other time,’ she continued, seeing that Burke looked annoyed. ‘Eleanor is aware of it,’ she added, ‘as it was for her sake I gave it to help him out of some scrape.’

Burke looked relieved. The simple, childish face of the girl was so innocent, it was impossible not to believe what she said.

Burke was completely forgiven and reinstated in Florence’s good graces. He told her over and over again that she was, and had always been, the only woman he had ever truly loved, and not only was there nothing between him and Miss Page, but he had a very bad opinion of her.

‘I wonder what the Whitbys will think of Wake taking up with Unlimited Loo,’ he said, as he caressed the pretty fingers he still retained. Then, laughing heartily, he continued: ‘It was as good as a farce to see how she bamboozled Carew. Oh! he was green!’

‘But,’ said Florence reprovingly. ‘if you knew she did not care for Mr. Carew, why did you not warn him?’

‘Faith, not I; love is stronger than friendship, and he would only have quarrelled with me. Didn’t he want to shoot me once, only Louisa prevented him?’

‘She did one good thing, at least,’ said Florence. ‘What should I have done if you had been killed?’

‘My darling, I was in no danger from a bad shot like Carew. If we *had* gone out, I should have fired in the air.’

‘How noble of you!’ said Florence, her pretty blue eyes alight with enthusiasm.

The young man laughed.

‘One couldn’t have missed him if one tried, for he is as broad as a haystack. But I tell you, dear, the poor fellow is awfully cut up. I had partly spotted Louisa, but Carew had painted her in the most vivid colours of his imagination, and endowed her with all the nine cardinal virtues. By Jove! he finds out she has all the cardinal sins instead!’

‘But,’ asked Florence, ‘is she really so bad?’

Burke was, of course, too much of a gentleman to tell Florence—an innocent young girl—the scandalous story, which, if spread abroad, would be received with such gusto at the various mess-tables of the garrison. Certainly neither Carew nor Burke would circulate the *esclandre*, although it

must soon be known, gossiped about as it would be by the numerous servants of both camps.

'But,' continued Florence, 'your conversion was very sudden?'

'Rather; it was too bad of her to take up Wake and throw Carew over.'

Carew entered, looking very depressed and miserable.

Burke burst out in a cheery voice:

'Och! the top of the mornin' to ye, me darlint!'

'The same to you,' returned Carew, smiling in spite of himself. Then, turning to Florence, he added, 'Miss Rawley, I am glad to see our patient improving so rapidly, aided by the gentle ministrations of your fair hands.'

'Yes,' she said, looking as bright as a sunbeam, 'he is really picking up now. But I will run away and leave you together for a little while; only don't let him talk too much, Mr. Carew.' And so saying, she left the room.

She had no sooner departed than the love-lorn Carew, with a deep sigh, seated his colossal frame on the bed where Burke lay, shaking the frail couch to its very foundations, and threatening to break it down bodily.

'Tare an 'ouns!' roared the invalid; 'you are shaking the life out of me! Convey yourself elsewhere, and don't put on that miserable look, man. You are about as cheerful as a gravestone coming to see a fellow! You'll be the death of me—I, who want to ride in the Meerut races next week.'

Carew deposited himself in an arm-chair, which he drew up close to the bed.

'I wish you were well,' he said, 'if it were only that you might arrange a little affair of honour for me.'

The Irishman's eyes sparkled! He forgot he was ill and weak, he forgot Florence's parting injunction, and sat up on his couch in a state of excitement.

'I demand the satisfaction of a gentleman from that scoundrel, Wake! I was engaged to Miss Page,' the squire added, somewhat incoherently; 'and that fellow has stepped between us in a most unjustifiable manner; he shall not injure me with impunity, however. I will call him out. For this purpose I required a friend; and as I don't know many people here, I went to Captain Maunders, to ask him to be the bearer of my challenge to the villain!'

'Well done!' said Burke, in high glee. 'There never was

such a fire-eater as you are ; but I suppose you know that Wake is a dead shot ?

‘That has nothing to do with it ; he must meet me. Well, I found Maunders just starting to join his regiment at Meerut ; he refused to assist me, and, I think, was exceedingly uncourteous. “Don’t you see, sir,” said he, “that my boxes are packed and my carriage is waiting for me to start ? And why the devil should I arrange a duel for you, and probably get myself tried by court-martial ? Duels are not allowed nowadays. And besides, by Gad, sir, why should *you* fight ? It’s all about some woman, I’ll be bound. Go away and forget her, sir ; there never was one of the sex worth fighting about. Besides, it would be a great deal too much trouble, worked to death as I am, from morning to night ; how could I find the time to attend to your affairs ?” Now, Burke, I was so angry with the disagreeable old fellow that I felt inclined to fight him ; but I had no opportunity, for he got into the mail-cart and drove away. Could you find me a second ?’

‘I don’t know,’ answered Burke ; ‘but have you seen Louisa since that eventful night ?’

‘Seen her ? No ; I’ll never see her again.’

‘I think,’ said Burke, ‘it is only fair to her, after all, that you should go and hear what she has to say about the affair. It certainly looked fishy, but she may have some reason to give for being in Wake’s tent at that hour of the night. Do you think she was going off with him, and that they were packing up ? I pity that poor devil of an ensign if that was *her* luggage in the tent ; when I followed you in I could not help wondering at all the baggage which was collected there.’

Carew’s mind was relieved at the idea thrown out by Burke, that perhaps there might be a reasonable explanation of Louisa’s conduct. After all, the poor fellow felt that he still cared for Louisa too devotedly to be able to give her up without a final struggle, and he was delighted at an excuse for seeing her once more. And, moreover, was it fair to break with her without giving her a chance of defending herself ?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HAUNTED BUNGALOW.

It was sunset before the Pages set out on their tedious journey to Delhi, and they travelled slowly, on account of the vast quantity of baggage with which they were encumbered, but eventually, after delays and stoppages, they reached the large unfurnished house which Wake had taken for them. From their new abode the beautiful old city could be seen across the river Jumna, where stretched out like a panorama beneath them lay the city walls and gateways, which, with the minarets of mosques, gardens, and flat-roofed houses, formed a splendid picture, once seen never to be forgotten ; but Miss Page was but little pleased to find in what close proximity they were to the Whitbys, the yellow-thatched roof of whose bungalow could be discerned near at hand.

The house they had taken resembled a great dilapidated Italian villa, by whom built it would now be difficult to ascertain, for, like most Anglo-Indian abodes, the name of the person who had caused it to be erected had long since been forgotten. The bungalow, with a flat roof surrounded by ornamental balustrades painted white, was a straggling, irregularly-planned building of two stories. The interior showed, by its zenana compound and secluded women's apartments, that it had been designed for and occupied by one of those semi-Oriental Englishmen who, eighty years ago, founded our power in what was then called the North-West Provinces.

Major Page's servants were more than ever filled with horror when they heard that they were to take temporary possession of this haunted house. They said, ' Was it not known that the Captain Sahib who last lived in it had been found killed—run through with his own sword ? Was it not publicly reported that should anyone's evil fate oblige them to pass the night there that their clothes would be rent, and they themselves beaten by malicious spirits ? It was a place in which undisturbed sleep was impossible, on account of the strange and alarming noises which drove slumber from every eye.' Even the invaluable and imperturbable Golaub Sing had remonstrated with the Major about it, who merely said

in reply that 'signs and wonders were the forerunners of the millennium,' while Louisa showed a loaded pistol, and said that she would shoot the first ghost who annoyed her.

In spite of protest and remonstrances, the Pages established themselves in the haunted bungalow, accompanied by Wake, who, having removed the remaining treasure, had overtaken them on the road, and now entered into possession with them.

The Asiatic part of the community, found some consolation in the fact that they would sleep in their own quarters, far away from the dreaded house, and Louisa and Wake were again only rejoiced at their superstitious terror, as it would enable them the better to conceal their hoards without fear of interruption.

Much has been written about the disagreeables of poverty, but no philosopher has sufficiently dilated upon the misery attendant upon the possession of riches. Both Wake and Louisa, from being exceptionally careless mortals, were now converted into a pair of suspicious conspirators. Every stranger was to them a robber, every odd noise full of sinister meaning, and where thieves were not feared imaginary informers were dreaded; and though they asserted with some show of truth that they had a right to what they had found, Louisa had a sense of shame, or at least a fear of detection. But her male companion had no such scruples. Large as the treasure was, he had but one regret—that he had not obtained more. Louisa had displayed a great deal of shrewdness and ingenuity in advising Wake as to concealing the property he had acquired in so singular a manner. They had divided their fortune into several portions, so as not to have all their eggs in one basket, as Wake had expressed it. The coins and gems, being of a more portable nature, they had already secreted—some in the city of Delhi, some in Meerut, and some in other places. What they had brought to the Red House was the most bulky, and consisted chiefly of the ingots of gold which Wake had ingeniously coated with clay before he brought them from Secro.

The first night after their arrival, when the servants had retired, and the Major was in his usual intoxicated slumber, Louisa and Wake proceeded to those subterranean rooms which had induced Wake to take the house. In one of these, which had evidently been the summer refuge of some

member of the fair sex, they discovered a small recess in the wall fitted with stone shelves, reaching from the floor to the ceiling of the apartment, but there was no door to this little alcove. The floor of the place was of clay, and the walls were cased with the same substance.

Louisa remarked :

‘This dark place would answer our purpose, but we must not bury the things under the floor ; for the natives always themselves conceal treasure in that way, and if they had any suspicion they would only have to pour water on the ground, and they could very easily find out if the earth had been lately removed, as the water would sink in quickly.’

‘Why not use this recess ?’ said Wake.

‘I thought of that,’ she answered ; ‘but there is no door to it, and we should have to brick it up.’

‘Well,’ he replied, ‘there are a few loose stones and bricks lying about in these cellars, but not enough to do all we want. If we tried to get more from the natives they would wonder what we are at.’

‘Happy thought ! let us mix the gold bricks in with the stones, and plaster all of it over with clay. No one will ever find it out,’ said Louisa.

Wake consented, and they worked with a will all that night, Louisa carrying most of the treasure down into the underground room, while her companion built up the wall. They filled the stone shelves with valuables, and then carefully walled it in, giving a final coating of the tenacious clay to the whole. Buildings of mud are exceedingly common in India, and even when more solid materials are used the floors and hearths of Asiatic abodes are covered with wet clay, which is daily renewed by the women of the household for the sake of cleanliness.

While they were engaged in their somewhat laborious task Louisa said :

‘What we have put away here is to be *my* treasure. You can have what we cannot conceal.’

Wake laughed.

‘Well, Louisa, you have got the most valuable portion of the treasure ; what we have put here must be worth fifty thousand pounds at least. You can drive in your own carriage-and-four some day, if your ladyship wishes it,’

At early dawn Louisa 'tidied up' (as she called it), cunningly removing all traces of their handiwork sufficiently to escape the keen-eyed scrutiny of the numerous servants by whom they were surrounded. They made their way to the upper regions at an early hour, before the domestics had returned to the bungalow, and went to their respective chambers. On the way Louisa remarked :

'I hope there was no spy-hole through which anyone could see us. I cannot help fearing the natives will find the treasure and steal it from us.'

'They cannot get at all our other deposits,' he answered, 'even if they discovered this, though I should be sorry to lose any after the bother we have had with it. But I am not afraid; you'll see I'll get my nuggets coined by the Bank of England, and then I shall be a great swell.'

Louisa was in a very good humour, 'kind as kings upon their coronation day.' She was completely overjoyed at this unexpected prosperity, of which she intended to have her full share, and, elated with their success, Wake and she lulled all their fears and suspicions to sleep.

The next morning, after a late breakfast, Wake, who was ostensibly on a visit to the Pages, was looking out of the window when, to his great annoyance, he perceived in the garden the figure of the little old witch, who was attired in red and green, and looked as gorgeous as a humming-bird. His brow darkened; he knew that this woman was the only living being who was aware of his connection with the fakir and the lost papers of the Newab of Doobghur. Certainly no one was likely either to cross-question or believe that drivelling old Pagan, but he feared she might gossip about him to the servants, and in this way tales to his disadvantage would become current, and lead to an official investigation, which he greatly dreaded. He turned furiously upon Louisa, who was sitting reading.

'Why is that old woman here? Who brought her?'

'I did, of course; she had nowhere else to go.'

'But I've told you over and over again that she is the accomplice of Thugs and dacoits.'

'Oh! that's nonsense,' said Louisa. 'But if she is dangerous, is it not better to keep her here as a friend, than to make an open enemy of her by sending her away?'

'You shall send her away,' cried Wake angrily.

'I shall not,' she retorted, equally wrathful.

And then they quarrelled hotly and foolishly. They were too much alike in temper to be able ever to live long together amicably. They were both passionate, spoiled, wayward; and their squabbles resembled the ridiculous wranglings of a pair of ill-brought-up children. Wake was inclined to be domineering, but Louisa's nimble tongue would, in return, inflict wounds which drove him beside himself with anger.

There certainly was something very uncanny about the Red House. The nightly noises in it kept the nerves of the occupants in an extraordinary state of tension. No sooner did they retire to rest than they would hear what sounded like the shutters of the windows of the ground floor, on one side of the house, being violently shaken; but on going to see if anyone was there, no one could be found. At other times they would hear people talking, and footsteps resounding all over the building.

'The servants are playing tricks,' said Wake irritably. 'I wish I could find them out, I would make it hot for them.'

'I will find out the trick, if it is one,' said Louisa; 'though the servants seem to be a deal more terrified than we are.'

The disturbances were most insufferable on that side of the bungalow where the zenana compound, or yard, was situated. One night, without saying anything to the servants, Louisa, before retiring to rest, carefully locked the only door which opened from the servants' dwellings into this little court. Then she went to the store-room and, filling her small apron with flour, scattered it over the whole surface of the yard, or court, walking backwarks as she did so, that her feet might leave no trace. Then, entering the house, she securely fastened the door behind her.

'There,' she said to Wake, who had been watching her proceedings; 'no one can cross that court without our finding it out to-morrow morning.'

That night the noises were even greater than usual, and very early the next morning Louisa, accompanied by Wake, went to see the result of her stratagem, expecting to see the snowy surface of the ground marked by many feet. But no! The flour lay white and untouched, only in the centre of the

yard there was the solitary imprint of a gigantic human foot! There was only this one mark, no other; whether made by human or supernatural agency they never discovered. The size of the foot far exceeded that of any of the servants, all of whom Wake caused to walk on the flour, so that he might measure the marks made. The matter remained a mystery. The terror of the Asiatics was vastly increased, and they declared that an evil spirit had come, and left this ocular proof of its visit. Needless to say, the noises went on as before.

Some few days after this occurrence, as Louisa and Wake were in the drawing-room, they beheld a stout figure under a large white umbrella approaching the door. It was twelve o'clock, the fashionable hour for paying ceremonious visits. They both jumped to their feet in surprise, for they recognised Squire Carew.

'Don't admit him, Louisa,' cried Wake. 'It's like his impudence to come calling here.'

'I shall see him if I choose,' retorted Louisa, with her usual docility. 'It's no affair of yours.'

'It is my affair, and I will make it mine,' cried Wake furiously.

By this time a servant had placed the visitor's card in Louisa's hand.

'Admit the gentleman,' she said haughtily to the man, and, quickly following his card, the squire entered the room.

Wake, not thinking the time expedient for making a scene, hastily left the apartment by one door, as Carew entered by the other.

As her former admirer approached, Louisa saw by his manner that he had come either to reproach her or demand an explanation. So, before he could say a word, she, taking the bull by the horns, began:

'You needn't go and gossip in Delhi about me, and tell the whole station how you found me in Henry Wake's tent. You may as well know the truth of the matter: I told you once that I had been very foolish, and I tell you now that my folly consisted in falling in love, or fancying I did, with Henry Wake, when he was but nineteen, and I barely seventeen years of age. I am in his power,' she continued; 'but I love you best, so it is hardest upon me, after all.'

‘But why did you encourage my attentions?’ he asked. ‘You could not have misunderstood them.’

‘Because I wanted them,’ she answered defiantly. ‘A woman cannot be in love with two men at once. I like you, and I do not like him; although he considers me bound to him. I had hoped that Fate would help us.’ And then Louisa burst into tears. ‘I don’t want to be an ensign’s wife,’ she sobbed. ‘I could do so much better, and marry a commanding officer if I chose! Even the general of the division pays me more attention than he does to anyone else.’

‘You should not talk in that way,’ said Carew, who could not help feeling a little shocked at her worldliness and heartlessness. ‘Remember, if you are engaged to Wake, and he truly cares for you, you have your duty to perform to him.’

‘Duty!’ she cried pettishly. ‘Don’t talk to me of duty. Men take very good care to do only what *they* like, and then they preach to women about duty.’

‘But what are you going to do?’ he asked. ‘Why do you not let the world know the truth?’

‘No. I trust to your honour not to repeat what I have told you. I will never live with Wake if I can help it. I am far happier with my poor old father.’

‘But you must behave honourably,’ he pleaded, ‘or break your bonds.’

‘I wish I could!’ she answered passionately. ‘Wake is going off immediately to join his regiment in the Punjaub; I shall certainly not go with him; perhaps I may not see him for a good six months at least, and I trust to the chapter of accidents to rid me of him some day. I hate him!—and I have good cause to do so.’

‘Is he such a bad-hearted fellow?’ asked Carew, surprised at her violence.

‘I am heartily ashamed of him. He is so different to everyone else; always in hot water; always in some disgraceful scrape. He pretends he loves me; and yet he does not mind disgracing himself or me.’ Then, changing her manner, she added: ‘But what are your plans? Are you going back to England?’

‘Yes; I think I shall, after I have seen a little more of India.’

‘Oh, how fortunate you are!’ she said. ‘Men are so

lucky. They can come when they like, and go when they please, and they never think of the broken hearts they leave behind them. And she covered her face with her hands and again wept bitterly.

Carew was deeply moved at the distress and grief of the woman he loved. He forgot her faults—he forgot everything, only that she was in trouble.

‘Will you, then, think of me sometimes when I am gone?’ he said gently.

‘Think of you?’ she answered, raising her tearful eyes to his. ‘I wish to Heaven I could forget you as easily as you will forget me! I know,’ she added, blushing deeply, ‘that I have lost your good opinion. I know that you must have thought it wicked of me to be in Wake’s tent that night. Bad as he is, he has great influence over me. He made me come to see some valuables that he proposed to give me. I love pretty things, and so I went.’

‘But,’ said Carew gravely, ‘why go at night?’

‘Oh,’ she answered, ‘he did not wish his servants—or, indeed, anyone—to know that he had those precious things.’

‘But how did he get them?’

‘He got them honestly enough; they formed part of a treasure which he discovered buried under the ruins of Secro. My curiosity to see those lovely things overcame my prudence; but do not—do not think I went there because I cared for him. You must tell no one about this conversation or about the treasure. I am pledged to secrecy about it; only I saw in your eyes that you thought me a wicked girl: and I would dare anything rather than forfeit your good opinion.’

This confession, which he implicitly believed, raised a great weight off the mind of the simple, honest squire, who was only too ready to believe that the woman he had loved, and still loved, had not deserved utterly to lose his respect.

‘Forgive my ungenerous suspicions of you,’ he said humbly.

‘I will never doubt you again as long as I live.’

‘I will forgive you if you can forgive me,’ she answered.

As she stood before him, her shining eyes, her golden hair, her magnificent figure, made a very picture of loveliness. She really liked Carew, and she seriously coveted his Essex estates, and she was as seductive as a siren as she said, in her low, sweet tones:

‘Oh! if I *could* only go with you to England, away from this hateful place, with all its gossip and slander!’

She looked pleadingly into his countenance, and, stooping down, the fascinated Carew kissed her passionately, and then hurried out of her presence, feeling ill at ease with himself at the breach of honour he had committed in kissing the girl who, he believed, was engaged to marry another man. But he had scarcely quitted the house when Wake re-entered the room, looking like a man absolutely possessed with rage and jealousy.

‘How dare you allow that fellow to kiss you?’ he stormed. ‘How dare you lie to him? How dare you trifle with that honest, simple gentleman, who, after all, is worth something better than you—a heartless, wicked, and depraved woman!’

‘How dared you play the spy and eavesdropper, mean coward that you are?’ retorted Louisa.

‘What game are you up to now, leading that poor fellow on?’ he continued. ‘I’ll stop it, whatever it is, for I will take you with me to the Punjaub.’

‘I will never go with you—never!’ she exclaimed. ‘I shall go to England, where Mr. Carew will protect me from you.’

Wake caught her savagely by the wrist.

‘You would drive any man mad!’ he said. ‘But you are only saying this to provoke me!’

‘I mean to do it,’ she answered. ‘Whether you are provoked or not, I shall go to England.’

He dashed her from him with an angry oath, and she fell heavily, striking her white forehead against the table near which they had been standing. The blow stunned her; but Wake did not remain to ascertain the result of his violence. He rushed out of the room, and then out of the house, like a man pursued by angry fiends.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SLAVE OF IMPULSE.

THE numerous men-servants loitering in the hall could not help noticing that Wake left the house in a very wild manner, and that he was evidently angry. They had also heard the loud toned conversation carried on between him and their

young lady ; but their quarrels were so common an occurrence that this fact alone would have attracted no attention. An old bearer, entering the drawing-room soon afterwards, found his mistress lying white and senseless on the floor, with a stream of blood flowing from her temple ; and, horrified at the sight, he called for assistance. The ayah, who had been Louisa's servant for some years, on seeing her condition, declared with tears and screams that her young lady was dead ; and the men, not deeming an Englishman capable of an act of brutality towards a woman, asserted that this must be the work of those evil spirits who, it was well known, had caused the death of the former occupant of the house.

Major Page was hastily summoned, but his unfortunate condition did not admit of his being able to give any coherent orders about his daughter. Then the servants remembered that the doctor had just ridden past to pay his daily visit to Ensign Burke. The Whitbys' house was but a few hundred yards distant, and the ayah, spurred by fear, rushed into it calling for the doctor, and declaring that her mistress was dead : ' Murdered, Providence only knew whether by men or ghosts.'

Dr. Ingledew hurried off, accompanied by Whitby and Eleanor, who, hearing that some great misfortune had undoubtedly befallen this unfriended girl, felt that in common humanity they were bound to do all that lay in their power for her. When they entered the drawing-room of the ' Haunted Bungalow,' they found the startling news but too true ; for the young Englishwoman was lying, to all appearance dead, on the floor.

The doctor held some brandy to the lips of the prostrate girl, whose ghastly countenance, disfigured by stains of blood, presented a pitiable sight. After he had succeeded in forcing some of the stimulant down her throat, Louisa opened her eyes and, looking wildly about her, said faintly :

' Where am I ?'

Eleanor stooped down, and said kindly :

' You are with friends, who will take care of you.'

Louisa looked at her without appearing to recognise her. They lifted the girl from the ground, and placed her on a settee, while the surgeon dressed the wound in her head, which, on examination, he found was only a superficial one. Seeing that Miss Page now appeared conscious, Whitby

asked her if she could explain how the accident had happened.

'Happened?' she said excitedly. 'What *has* happened? I don't recollect. But I am hurt, and Wake did it.'

'Impossible!' said Eleanor. 'He could not, would not do such a thing.'

Louisa went on, in a somewhat incoherent manner:

'I say Harry struck me! He wants to murder me! He is jealous of me, and I—I hate him!' Then she talked disjointedly about 'bricks of gold,' 'the Witch of Megara,' and 'the gigantic footstep.' But here the doctor interposed.

'Miss Page does not know what she is saying,' he said; 'she has evidently been over-excited, and that, combined with the blow on her head, has made her delirious. I will mix her a composing-draught, and after she has had a little sleep, she will be more reasonable.'

The invalid was then conveyed to her own room, and Eleanor, who remained by her until she had fallen asleep, after giving some instructions to the ayah, returned home with her husband.

As she entered her own house she found her brother awaiting her. His wild, haggard appearance confirmed his sister's worst fears.

'What have you done? Are you mad, Harry?' she cried. 'What could have induced you to attempt the life of Louisa?'

'Is she dead?' he said. 'I almost wish she was.'

'How could you dare to strike a defenceless woman? This is worse than all you have done,' said Whitby sternly.

'Yes,' added Eleanor bitterly; 'for until now I never thought my brother was a coward.'

'What do you mean, both of you? God knows, Louisa provoked me past all endurance; but I did not strike her—I pushed her from me, and she fell. I do not defend myself for it, but I was not aware that she was hurt, for I was so ashamed of my mad violence that I immediately left the house.'

'It is a bad business,' said Whitby, 'although it might have been worse; she must have struck her head against the table, close to which we found her lying; and the blow might have been fatal. You call yourself an officer and a gentleman, and use violence to an unprotected girl! I never heard of anything more abominable.'

'It is very easy for you to talk,' said Wake; 'but if you saw another man making love to your wife and kissing her, I think even *you* would be beside yourself.'

'What! Your *wife*?' said Whitby.

'Yes,' answered Wake; 'I was married to Louisa Page in London four years ago.'

Whitby turned to Eleanor.

'Is this true?' he said.

'Yes,' she said, 'unfortunately it is true; my brother is really married to that wicked woman, who has been, and will be, the bane of his life.'

'But why,' said Whitby, 'why sail under false colours? Why is this not known to all the world?'

'It is not my doing; I am willing enough to own our marriage,' said Wake. 'Louisa has left me, and now wishes to annul our union if possible.'

'Then why do you not leave her to do as she pleases?'

'Because I cannot. I see her faults, I see even her wickedness; but, in spite of all, I would die to-morrow gladly if she would only love me in return.'

'But,' said Whitby, 'you have an extraordinary manner of showing your affection for her.'

'It was Carew who kissed her, and I will shoot him like a dog,' he said.

By this time Eleanor was weeping silently.

'Don't cry, Nell,' said Whitby; 'the scamp isn't worth it.'

'I cannot forget that he is my brother,' she said; 'he is always blamed, and yet all this misery comes from Louisa's heartless conduct.'

'That is all very well,' said Whitby, now thoroughly angry. 'But none of this could have happened if their marriage had been made known.'

Then turning to Wake, he continued:

'Fancy an officer, who should be a gentleman, beating his wife! What an example to the natives, and to your men! You had better leave the army, sir, before you are cashiered.'

'And, by heaven, I will!' answered Wake, white with rage at Whitby's words. 'I will send in my papers at once. I have as good a stomach for fighting as any man, and if there were any chance of active service I would *not* resign; but I am sick to death of military discipline—and of everything!'

'To leave the service is the very best thing you can do,' retorted his brother-in-law.

All this was intensely painful to Eleanor.

'Go away, Harry,' she said pleadingly. 'When we are calmer we will meet again; even now things have been said which can never be forgiven or forgotten.'

Wake kissed his sister's tearful face.

'If all women were like you, Nell,' he said, 'there would be no poor devils like me.'

'Don't be dragged down to her level, Harry,' said Eleanor.

'Pull yourself together, dear, and be a man once more.'

'That's easier said than done,' sighed Wake, as he left the room.

He rode away from his sister's door, caring little where he went or what became of him.

On the road he met the tall and handsome Willoughby, who said: 'Are you still here, Wake? I thought you had gone to join your regiment in the Punjaub.'

'I had two months' sick leave,' answered Wake, 'which is hardly up yet, and then I am allowed a month to join.'

'I wish I could get ten days' leave,' said the other. 'That beggar of a man-eating tiger is playing old Harry near Doobghur, about forty miles from here. I should like to have a shot at that brute; he has been carrying off some poor wretch nearly every day from the village near which he has taken up his abode.'

Wake brightened up, forgetting all his cares for the moment.

'That old shikarry, Lahal Singh, would go with you. The old fellow has taken a fancy to you; he would not look at Carew, but laughed and said, "Can a mouse kill a cat?" But you are a different sort of fellow, and a good shot.'

Wake accompanied Willoughby to the arsenal of Delhi, where they met a spare, aged man, a mere bundle of nerves, who was no less the mighty hunter, Lahal Singh. The old man, laughingly scrutinising Wake, called him a mere youth, and asked him if he was weary of his existence.

'That I am,' said Wake bitterly; 'but what is more, I will give you two hundred rupees to go with me to kill that tiger.'

This put a new complexion on the affair, and the old man agreed to accompany him, saying that they would first post

to Doobghur, after which they must follow the prey on foot. He gave directions that they should take some light provisions with them, and stated that on no account must they light a fire in the jungle. To all this Wake willingly agreed, and that night they started. The Englishman's weapons were a double-barrelled gun and a rifle, while round his waist was fastened a hunting-knife and a bag containing food; while Lahal Singh's only means of defence or attack was an old sword.

After travelling all night in a dāk gharry, they arrived at their destination, a village where they found the inhabitants gathered together in the public square, discussing the tragical event of the preceding night, which was that the village postman had fallen a prey to the devouring monster who kept their hamlet in a state of constant terror. They looked with respectful joy at the old man and the young Englishman who had come to attempt to deliver them from their deadly enemy. Nevertheless, they were not at all hopeful of their success, for many hunters had pursued this special tiger, but he was so cunning and cowardly that he was only seen by those who could offer no resistance to him. The villagers took our adventurers outside their boundary, and in the jungle showed them some human remains, those of the last victim of the tiger. Without losing any time, Lahal Singh began to look carefully for the trail of the cruel beast, and, after some time, he was able to discover it. He went through bushes, woods, and waste places, followed by Wake, and they walked in this manner many hours until nightfall. Wake dined upon some biscuits he had brought with him, and then they slept on the open ground. Before going to rest the young man was about to light a consoling pipe, when his guide interfered, declaring that it would betray their vicinity to the enemy. Another day they wandered through the wild region around them, and another night they slept under the stars. In this vast solitude, engrossed by the excitement of the chase, Wake almost forgot the fever fit of passionate rage and jealousy he had lately experienced; there in constant communion with Nature, far from the love, hate, and avarice of the human race, he felt a different and a better man.

On the morning of the third day they again started, following the track of the tiger. The traces which formed

a sure clue to Lahal Singh were so slight that they were invisible to the eyes of the Englishman. About nightfall they had reached the bed of the river whose shrunken stream of water ran between low sand-cliffs, and here, in the moonlight, Wake saw for the first time, close to the river, the footprints of the animal they were tracking.

‘Yes,’ whispered Lahal Singh, ‘he must be quite near; he has only just passed, and this nullah is said to be his home.’

Wake’s heart began to beat excitedly. Of course he had often been out in pursuit of small game, such as birds and deer, but never before had he ventured to pursue so formidable an animal. He proposed to his guide that he should scale the cliff on the opposite side of the river, while Lahal Singh watched the ford, but the old hunter was in favour of their remaining together. Heedless of his remonstrance, Wake, impetuous and impulsive as ever, dashed across the river, and ran up the sandy acclivity beyond. Lahal Singh had warned him that the tiger would probably return by the same ford he had crossed, and Wake had no sooner breasted the steep than he saw the head of the animal, whose eyes were looking straight at him from over a bush only a few yards away. The Englishman, carefully taking aim, fired, but could not perceive that his shot had taken effect, for in another second the huge beast made a rush, and he had barely time to drop his gun and seize his knife before the tiger was upon him and he was knocked down.

Wake thought his last hour had come, but, to his surprise, the monster lay motionless. His spring had been his death-struggle. The young man rose to his feet, and saw that the dreaded man-eater lay dead before him, for the rifle-shot had entered his head. The Englishman now fired off his second gun to attract the attention of Lahal Singh, who soon joined him, and whose delight was boundless on seeing the prostrate form of the defunct tiger.

‘By the favour of Providence, you, although a youth, have been able to deliver this village of Doobghur from one who has made many mothers childless,’ he cried enthusiastically; and then went on to say that at no very great distance there was a farm, or village, whence they could obtain men to carry the tiger.

The Newab of Doobghur, on hearing of the exploit, sent his elephant for the brave Englishman to ride upon. It was the first time that Wake had ever journeyed on one of these unwieldy brutes. His quickly-performed return journey to Delhi resembled a triumphal progress. The tiger, borne by sixteen men, was carried in front of him in triumph, and the villagers on the road came out and joined the procession, jumping and singing for joy before the carcase of their fallen foe; and while they extolled the bravery of the valiant Sahib, they abused the ancestors of the defunct tiger to the seventh generation. As Wake rode along, he could not but consider this a curious freak of fortune; for he was being honoured by the very man who had employed Sims to seek for him, and who claimed the treasure which Wake now possessed.

But before reaching Delhi, Wake sent a message to the Pages' bungalow to order his servants to pitch tents in readiness for him at Budlee-ka-Serai, and from that place he informed his sister and Whitby of his success in tiger-shooting. The news quickly ran through the three regimental messes that he had, almost unattended, tracked the tiger on foot, and Wake was the hero of the hour. Even Whitby, while admiring his gallant exploit, almost forgot that they had but lately called him a coward. Wake was invited to dine at all the regimental messes, who would have vied with each other in fêting him; but he declined their proffered hospitality, and remained in misanthropic isolation in his tent, amongst the crumbling remains of regal splendour, at Budlee-ka-Serai, or, accompanied by Lahal Singh, shot wild geese, now migrating northwards, and innumerable teal, in the marshy land about Nujufghur.

But one day he mounted his horse and rode in hot haste the ten miles into Delhi, almost without drawing rein. He went to the Post Office, and to its care entrusted a letter pregnant with his fate. He had sent in his papers, and announced his determination of no longer serving her Majesty. This, like all the other actions of his life, was the result of an impulse.

It was in such a mood that, when a boy, he had run away with Louisa Page; it was in another he had enlisted; and it was by no premeditated action that he had killed the fakir. His treasure-hunting had been far less prompted by calcu-

lating avarice than by a sudden impulse to acquire riches for his wife, whose love of money he well knew, and who, he hoped, would return to him if he were wealthy. And now, in a fit of pettish anger, he had thrown away the commission acquired for him with so much difficulty, for his wayward nature rebelled against the control and subordination absolutely requisite in military life. His thoughts would continually wander to the Haunted Bungalow. He longed to see Louisa, but shame and anger prevented him from going to her. In a vague way, too, at times he thought of the treasures hidden away; but, having ample money for all his present inexpensive needs, he determined to put off to a more convenient season any course of action by which he could remove and dispose of the enormous amount of property of which he was the fortunate possessor.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CALL OF DUTY.

CAPTAIN WHITBY was riding home from morning parade. The sky was cloudless and luminously clear, and the sunshine bathed the whole scene in the most glorious golden light. From the road on the Ridge of Delhi, on which he was, he could see the ancient splendid city beneath him, while near at hand on the roadside was one of those unenclosed, semi-deserted graveyards, filled with artistically-carved monuments, such as are always to be found outside the walls of Mahomedan cities.

At the foot of a slab of beautifully-sculptured white marble he saw a patch of dirty-tinted colour, resembling a bundle of rags. It was in reality a crouching human figure, and as Whitby approached nearer an aged gray head was raised, and he found fixed on him a pair of gleaming black eyes all ablaze with misery and hatred. It was the Witch of Megara! Whitby was a bit of a philanthropist, and it struck him as deplorable to see a human face so distorted with evil passions and discontent. He alighted from his horse, and holding the bridle in his hand, approached the old woman.

‘What is troubling you, my friend?’ he asked gently.

‘Why should a Sahib care what troubles an old woman? Ride on and fulfil your destiny!’

‘But what has happened?’ he continued. ‘Does that young lady no longer protect you?’

The old woman rose excitedly, and poured out a stream of maledictions against Louisa.

‘What have I done,’ asked the aged crone, ‘that I should be driven from her door with insults by her Hindoo servants, the sons of burnt fathers? She has turned me away, saying, “Go, eat stones, for I will give you no more bread.” All men, even the Faithful, say, “Go, accursed witch!”’

‘I do not say so,’ answered Whitby gently. ‘While I remain in this place you shall not die of hunger. Come to me on the first of each month, when I get my pay, and I will give you five rupees, so that you may have bread.’

The old woman asked suspiciously, ‘Do you fear the power of my curse, that you do this? Why should you befriend me?’

‘Why not?’ he asked. ‘Your prophet says that the road to Heaven is through the gate of charity. My faith also teaches me that it is a man’s duty to assist the poor.’ He placed some silver in her hand, and, with a good-natured smile, added, ‘You will not forget to come every month. You know where I live.’

She murmured many high-flown compliments and benedictions, and seemingly inspired with renewed life, despite her advanced age, she tripped quickly away toward the city, and Whitby, remounting his horse, went on his way.

He found his wife waiting at the door of the house to welcome him.

‘Nellie, as I was coming back from parade I met that old soul they call the Witch of Megara. It appears that now Carew is gone, Louisa or her servants have turned the unfortunate creature away.’

‘She is a mischievous old woman, is she not?’ asked Eleanor.

‘Poor thing! To me there is something infinitely pathetic in ill-used old age. Probably she did her work and duty in her day, and now, tottering on the verge of the grave, she is absolutely alone; besides, she is hated for no sensible reason that I can see.’

‘Do you think witchcraft impossible?’ asked Eleanor.

‘I have not studied the subject,’ he replied, ‘but if that poor old woman is malignantly inclined towards the human

race, I am not surprised at it, for the world does not treat her with either common humanity or justice. I intend to pay her a trifle monthly while we are here.'

'You are right, dear Dick,' said his wife.

Some wise man has told us to beware when all our hopes seem realized, all our wishes fulfilled. This caution might have been laid to heart by Whitby, for there were few happier men in the world than he. The things which composed his contentment were the not uncommon elements of life—a moderate income, a loving wife, congenial work, and the respect of his fellow men. There was a marvellous affinity of mind between him and the woman he had married; they thought alike on all important subjects; they had the same pursuits, and in things of smaller moment they agreed to differ. A man must have something in him, or at least is fortunate, who has a thoroughly devoted partisan in his wife. Whatever the world at large thought of Whitby, there was one mind, and that not an unintelligent one, to whom he was the best and bravest, the cleverest of men. It is said that love is blind, but is it so? It is only with the eyes of love we can see the Divine in each other. To Eleanor her husband was a demi-god walking among mortals; and who can say that the influence which Whitby exercised over those who came into contact with him was not the outcome of the subtle home atmosphere in which he was so revered, and which kept him true to his manliest instincts?

One morning, not long after his interview with the witch, Whitby, looking very grave, entered the room in which his wife was seated.

'Eleanor, I have been asked,' he said, 'by the Lieutenant-Governor to undertake a somewhat singular duty, but it is left optional with me whether I accept it or not.' He spoke so gravely that Eleanor listened with trembling surprise. 'If,' continued Whitby, 'you say stay, I will stay; if you say go, I will go.'

'What is it, Dick?' she asked in perplexity. 'You know far better than I can what you ought to do, and you always do what you think right.'

'It is more or less a post of danger,' he answered; 'that is, it may be.'

'Oh, Dick!' and the tears rose unbidden to her dark eyes.

'Don't cry, Eleanor darling. It may prove nothing, after

all. Scindiah's troops have revolted, or at least are inclined to revolt, which is not quite the same thing. The Resident at Gwalior wants me to take them in hand. It is some muddling of somebody's about pay and privileges.'

'But must you really go?'

'If it is a mutiny or rebellion, it is better to kill it in the bud. Of course, use fair words and fair means first. But,' and there was a grim look on his face, and his eyes flashed ominously, 'if needs be, they ought to shoot or hang the ringleaders. The Governor wishes me to talk to them; but rebellions cannot be bound up with red tape, and I, for one, expect no very logical answers from exasperated men with arms in their hands. But, sweetheart,' lowering his voice to soft, loving tones, 'it is not my legitimate work. Shall I go?'

She answered calmly, though with an effort, for the impulse to say 'Stay!' was strong within her:

'If you can do any good, Richard, go! and may God preserve you; and then she pillowed her small head on his broad breast and sobbed. He was so dear to her, he was her all in this world.

'It is leaving you,' he said, 'which makes it hard for me to go. I know you are as brave-hearted as you are gentle. I know you would not keep me.'

She tried to answer cheerfully, quoting the words of an old poet, 'I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more.'

'Cheer up, darling,' he said; 'it may all end well, and will most likely end in smoke. Do not break your heart.'

'I am a very coward on your account, Dick,' she answered; 'but, as you say, of course nothing very dreadful is likely to happen. I am so happy when you are with me, so utterly wretched when you are away, that your leaving for a single day seems an overwhelming misfortune. Cannot I go with you?'

'It would be better not.'

'When do you leave, Dick?'

'To-night.'

'So soon?'

'Well, my darling, the sooner the better. As I said before, mutinies cannot be mended with red tape.'

The day was passed in all the stirring activity of packing

and preparations, and in the evening a travelling carriage stood under the portico of Whitby's house, for the hour of his departure had come. He himself (his tall figure muffled in a military cloak) stood in the drawing-room, talking to his wife.

'Before I start, Eleanor,' he said, 'I will give you a pistol. I have not had time to load it, and you are not likely to require it. Still, it is as well to have fire-arms in a house with only women and a sick man in it.'

'Very well,' she answered; 'I can load it.'

The weapon was left on the table, and she followed him to the hall-door. They bid each other a final good-bye. As Whitby entered the carriage Eleanor said, 'You will be back in ten days, and will write every day;' then she added, with a sad little smile, 'You know I cannot be happy one minute without you.'

Richard Whitby had led a stirring soldier's life; his career had not been one of fun and finery passed in garrison towns. He had been wounded more than once, and had seen a great deal of active service. As soon almost as he had joined he had served at Candahar, in the first Afghan War. Then he had been in the thick of the fighting in the two Punjaub campaigns, and had been present at the hardly-fought battles of Ferozeshah, Sobraon, and Chilianwallah. He was not one of Fortune's favourites; added to which, in 1852, as we have before stated, he in common with the whole of his regiment had incurred the wrath of Lord Dalhousie. It is possible that, but for this, his good services, his knowledge of Asiatic languages, and the almost miraculous influence his simple and manly character exercised over Orientals, might have gained him recognition and a post of wealth. However, that was not to be; for one thing, he never advertised or pushed himself, but rather held aloof from influential circles. Moreover, he had more than an average amount of moral courage; he would speak unpalatable truth and 'shame the devil,' as he expressed it, therefore it may be conjectured that his Satanic Majesty or his vicegerent on earth did not particularly admire Richard Whitby, nor study his interests; still he had friends who believed in him, and it was one of these who had requested he might be sent to Gwalior.

A few nights after her husband's departure, as Eleanor sat

alone trying to beguile her loneliness by reading, her ayah suddenly entered the apartment.

‘Madam,’ she begun in a low mysterious tone, coming up close to her mistress—she was a so-called Portuguese, and she spoke English.

‘What is it?’ asked Eleanor, a little impatiently, struck by the woman’s peculiar tone, and noticing how strange and timid she looked.

‘That old woman, the Witch of Megara,’ answered the trembling servant, ‘has given me this,’ holding up a silver coin, ‘to take a message to you from her. She says such terrible things about your Excellency’s going to be murdered. Heaven forbid it!’

‘You are joking,’ said Eleanor calmly. ‘Why should anyone murder me? What have I done?’

‘Truth is known to God alone,’ answered the ayah; ‘I am but a woman, nothing is known to me, but the wise one says that your days are numbered.’

‘Absurd,’ said Eleanor. ‘I have always thought her mad.’

‘The Lord alone knows the secrets of the wicked,’ continued the ayah. ‘Knowledge is not given to your servant. Question the wise woman, for she says she is coming secretly this very night to see you. Will your excellency admit her? Hark! what is that sound? She has arrived.’

Most Anglo-Indian houses are built with back entrances for the convenience of the numerous servants, and from behind a heavy curtain which did service as a door leading to one of these entrances, the strange-looking old Witch of Megara suddenly emerged.

Eleanor could not help noticing how extremely small she was, barely five feet in height; and as she came near, Eleanor and Florence looked as if they belonged to a race of giants beside her. It happened that Florence Rawley had entered the room unexpectedly, and the advent of the stranger surprised her extremely. The old woman wore the very unbecoming Mahomedan dress of the country, only rendered picturesque by the upper part of her person being covered with a quantity of red-coloured drapery; and this, added to wild dark eyes, wrinkled face, and snowy hair, made her a very singular-looking object.

After making the customary salaam, she threw herself at

Eleanor's feet with the most impassioned gestures of terror. The ayah translated the following words: 'Fly, fly, while there is yet time!' she exclaimed, 'or you and the good Sahib will die. It is the will of Fate that my days are few. Your slave is old. I am ready to depart, to rejoin those who have gone before me. But, ah! your Grace,' clinging to Eleanor's knees, and raising her withered black hands imploringly, 'save your own life, and the life of your Sahib, and that of Carew Sahib, whose salt I have eaten, and of that child who is beloved by you,' and she pointed to Florence. 'To them and to you life is sweet! Your Excellency has heard nightly the noise of quarrelling in the servants' quarters, near the house. Your Excellency has sent to tell them to be quiet, but they will never be quiet more. Nightly they and the guard, with others from the city, discuss plans of rebellion and murder. The Moslems and Hindoos cannot agree to terms. Do they not hate each other? They conspire against the English; they write letters; fear is in the heart of all; voices come out of the wilderness and cry "Smite! smite!" Dogs howl dismally round the villages. Woe, woe, is foretold. Some of the prodigies are familiar, such as thunder, and some are unaccountable.'

'I do not fear such things,' said Eleanor imperturbably, hardly following the translation of the old woman's sybilline warnings poured out in the strange guttural language, and accompanied by frantic gestures. 'The Sahib is gone,' she continued, 'and if I fly, whither should I go?'

'The Lord be praised he has left,' answered the ancient crone. 'It is well; follow him; depart, depart at once, or you will surely die! But I must hasten hence or I shall be missed; no one knows that I have come to warn you. Silence! To no one repeat what I have said, but fly! fly!' she implored in her thin quavering voice, with a deprecatory gesture of her dusky arms.

Eleanor thanked her gently, but in her usual calm, unmoved tones. The old woman then left, and from the pillared veranda the Englishwomen saw in the clear moonlight the diminutive form of the Witch of Megara as she walked along the road to Delhi.

Eleanor's nature was a particularly fearless one; she was not easily alarmed; moreover, she felt thoroughly convinced

that the warnings of her aged visitor were simply the raving frenzy of a mind that had lost its balance.

But there had been one auditor upon whom the witch's ravings had had some effect, and that was poor little Florence, who looked pale and terrified.

'Eleanor, dear!' she cried, 'why did you let that dreadful old woman come? She is very, very wicked! She is a bird of ill omen! She is thought to have brought that thief who nearly murdered poor Desmond; some harm will happen to us, be sure of that.'

'Why should anyone murder us? Absurd! she is mad, poor old soul. But if you wish it, Florrie, I will load that pistol; but Richard will soon be back, and then it will be all safe.'

Mrs. Whitby awoke early the next morning, and the sun rose as if it were an ordinary day, and so came and went the next and the next; several days had passed, and as the evil predicted to her had not happened, the memory of the old woman's visit nearly faded from her mind. All was well with her husband; he had not yet arrived, but would soon return. Scindiah's troops had behaved with a discretion not to be expected of armed men; everything at Gwalior had returned to its normal state; a few ringleaders of martial discontent had been imprisoned, and that was all.

CHAPTER XX.

SAVED.

THE difficulty with Scindiah's troops having been arranged, Whitby was rejoiced to receive permission to return to his regiment at Delhi. It was a journey of more than twenty-four hours, posting unceasingly, and only stopping for hasty meals, and the necessary change of horses at the dāk bungalows. He made his way homeward without any mischance, and with no annoyance beyond the difficulty experienced in starting the wretched quadrupeds provided at the different stages, and who apparently were suffering from a recent rise in the price of corn. A miserable animal would be brought forth, seemingly without even the power of motion, but after four or five men had beaten and kicked, and pushed and pulled him, he would be induced to make a spasmodic start,

generally at a gallop; and finally six miles were accomplished, although the same difficulty occurred over again with his successor. But Whitby forgot all his compassion in his intense eagerness to get on with his journey; he certainly pitied the unfortunate animals, but that was all. Fortunately the tedium of travel was broken by his being able to sleep in the recesses of his vehicle, while his old bearer, his only attendant, smoked his hookah contentedly on the roof of the carriage.

To Whitby's great satisfaction, he discovered that they had got over another stage, and they had stopped at a staging-house in the cool gray dawn. It was just sunrise, and a great red sun was rising above the horizon, and could be seen across the broad level plains, while its rosy beams brightened the brown herbage by the side of the road.

As the impatient traveller emerged from his equipage, he perceived that there was another dāk gharry standing near with the horses taken out, and this fact informed him that he was not the only visitor who had arrived. However, as dāk bungalows are usually constructed to admit two separate parties, he did not anticipate any annoyance. He marched into the house, ordered his breakfast, and was soon enjoying some refreshing tea.

Whitby had concluded the meal, and was sitting in a placid mood on the Indian bedstead, covered with a mattress, which constituted the principal furniture of the apartment, when he perceived the figure of an Englishman standing in the veranda, but whose back was towards him. The stranger appeared to be a man about six feet in height and broad in proportion. He had light hair and whiskers, and was dressed in a suit of gray flannel, white shoes, and a light wideawake hat, with a lilac-coloured silk pugaree wound round it. He seemed to be admiring the fiery sun rising over the plain of brown grass, when suddenly a tall, graceful woman emerged from the bungalow, and going up to the admirer of nature, familiarly placed her white hand on his shoulder.

'Reggie,' she said, 'when will those brutes of natives be ready? The sun will be horribly hot before we reach the next stage.'

'Ah, my love,' said the man, 'I perceive our quadrupeds being conducted from their stable with that Oriental dignity

and slowness of movement which puts our fussy Anglo-Saxon hurry to shame.'

Whitby sprang to his feet. He saw before him Louisa and her lover, Reginald Carew.'

'This slow way of travelling is distracting,' Carew said. 'We shall certainly lose the mail steamer which leaves Bombay on the thirteenth.'

'And,' added Louisa crossly, 'my father or that insufferable Wake, when they find out that I have not gone to Meerut, will come after us and catch us up.'

Whitby now walked forward.

'Carew! Louisa!' he cried.

The lovers started apart, and, on seeing Whitby, both looked guilty and confused.

'Is it possible, Mr. Carew,' continued Whitby, 'that you have persuaded this misguided woman to leave her husband? I did not think you capable of such conduct, or that you, Louisa, would do anything so wicked.'

'Her husband! whose husband?' gasped the squire, red with confusion.

'Is it possible that you do not know that Louisa is privately married to Henry Wake?'

'Married! No!' blustered the squire. 'She is engaged to him, and is in his power.'

Whitby turned gravely to the woman.

'Louisa,' he said, 'am I not speaking the truth when I say that you are Wake's wife?'

She looked terror-stricken, but answered nothing coherently, though she muttered some indistinct words.

'Tell me, Louisa!' cried Carew, noticing her overwhelming confusion. 'It is not—it cannot be true! You have not deceived me?'

For a moment she made no answer; then recovering herself, she said defiantly:

'I know I cannot legally marry you, but I would sooner be your mistress than Wake's wife. Do not listen to him, Reggie,' she continued excitedly. 'I cannot live without your love! You promised to take me to England; and once there, no one need know.'

'You must be lost to all sense of shame to talk thus, Louisa,' said Whitby. 'Carew,' he added, turning to the squire, who stood perplexed and distressed, 'would you

dare to take advantage of this wretched girl's infatuation, and make her and yourself miserable for life ?'

'Reggie!' cried the distracted woman, 'do not leave me ! Take me away with you ! I do not care what happens afterwards, only take me away. If you leave me now, you can never have loved me !'

The squire paced up and down the veranda of the bungalow. 'My poor darling,' he said at last, 'I thought that savage brute Wake had terrified you into an engagement, and, as a man of honour, I thought myself justified in making a runaway match with the girl I loved. Louisa,' he said sadly, 'I would gladly have made you my wife ; but I love you too well, after all, to place you in a lower position.'

'Louisa,' said Whitby, addressing the now weeping girl, 'you must return to Delhi with me, and I pledge you my word of honour that no one shall know of this, not even my wife. I consider it very fortunate that I have accidentally been able to save you both from taking a step which you would have bitterly regretted all your lives. Where is Wake ?'

'I don't know, and I don't care. I never want to see him again.'

By this time the equipage in which the runaway pair had intended to proceed had drawn up to the door.

'Let me beseech you,' said Whitby to Carew, 'to go on at once and alone. Let Louisa's luggage be removed from your carriage, and I will take her back to the protection of her father.'

Whitby gave the necessary orders, and Carew, pale as death and with tears in his eyes, kissed Louisa, bidding her farewell for ever, and rushed from the house.

Very soon after, Whitby and Louisa started in the opposite direction ; after a silent journey of several hours—he being too grieved and she too sullen to talk—they approached the high walls and fine buildings of the city. Their equipage rattled through the crowded bazaars, then thundered through a mediæval gateway—the Cashmere gate—and they were soon in the pleasant, fresh, and green English suburb of the cantonments. Fortunately no people with gossiping tongues or prying eyes saw them, although the world was just awakening—officers were proceeding to

parade, and ladies and children were sallying out to enjoy the cool morning air. Before going to his own house Whitby deposited Louisa at her cheerless home; but as she entered the threshold of her abode, she addressed him in passionate tones, and with anger darting from her brilliant eyes:

‘You have made a fool of yourself and of me! What right had you to interfere? We were doing no harm! Mr. Carew was only escorting me to Meerut at my father’s request. I don’t like travelling alone, and I had to go to Meerut on business, to sell our house and furniture.’

‘But I heard you say you were going to England.’

‘And what of that? After I had arranged our affairs and sold everything at Meerut, my father and I were certainly going to England. If my father was himself you would not dare to insult me! Go! I hate you!’ she cried; ‘never dare to speak to me again.’

‘Louisa, if you were going to Meerut, how was it I met you on the road to Agra?’

She did not deign to answer him, but entered the house; then Whitby left. The carriage next drew up at his own bungalow, and, in the joy of meeting his wife, all thought of Miss Page vanished from his mind.

‘Oh, my darling!’ cried Eleanor, ‘how tired, how ill you look!’

‘Do I? Well, I have been travelling day and night,’ he answered, ‘added to which I have been somewhat worried; but now that I am home again I shall soon be once more the happiest man in her Majesty’s service.’

Florence Rawley then came in to greet the returned wanderer. She was in the gayest, merriest mood.

‘I can guess,’ said Whitby, ‘from your appearance that Desmond Burke is making a good recovery?’

‘Yes, thank God! he is doing well; but I have a great secret, a great piece of news to tell you: I am going to England!’

‘To England?’ said Whitby in astonishment. ‘Then what will poor Burke do?’

‘Oh, he is going with me,’ she said.

‘Lucky fellow! But how, Florence?’

‘He has been ordered home on sick leave. I am going to take care of him—he requires a nurse; but, of course, we are to be married first.’

Whitby laughed. 'So you are marrying him out of pure pity?'

'I am not half good enough for him. I wonder what he sees to like in a foolish little girl like me?'

'Oh, I see,' said Whitby, '*he* is making the sacrifice. Poor fellow! I always thought he would throw himself away.'

'Nonsense! We are to be married at Meerut on the 15th of May.'

'So very soon?'

'Oh, but we have been engaged for more than a year, and we love each other so.'

'That alters the case, certainly; and all I can say is that he is a lucky man.'

'He is such a patient darling. Why, even Dr. Ingledew said Desmond owed his recovery more to his singular equanimity of temper than to anything else.'

'Well,' said Whitby, 'I am not surprised at a young man evincing a sublimely serene disposition when he was waited upon by an angel.'

'Come, come, Dick,' said Eleanor, 'if you pour the butter so thickly over Florence, I shall be jealous. You never had such a talent for paying me compliments.'

'Arrah now,' said Whitby, with a tolerable imitation of an Irish brogue, 'and haven't I had a fine young gossoon from the ould counthry here; and hasn't he kissed the blarney-stone, me darlints? and do yez think I've larn't nothing from him at all, at all?'

At this moment the portière was hastily drawn aside, and Burke, looking decidedly paler and more emaciated than of old, came into the room, but with a countenance beaming with fun, and a sly twinkle in his bright blue eyes. He had heard the voices and had caught Whitby's assumed Milesian accents, and, with a scrape of his leg on the floor and a genuine Irish bow, he began:

'Welcome home again! Shure an' yer anner's the very gintleman I want to say.' Then, speaking seriously, he said, 'Have you heard the good news, and will you and Eleanor come to the wedding?'

'Of course we will,' answered Whitby cordially; 'and I wish every happiness to Florence and you.'

'Och!' shouted Burke, 'long loife and more power to yer

anner! Shure an' its meself's the happy bhoy this day entoirely.' Then, seizing a stick which was near at hand, he twirled it round his head, and, with a wild 'Who-o-op,' began to dance in the centre of the room. 'Come along, mavourneen,' he said to Florence, and taking her by the hand, the young couple stepped and footed in a wild Irish jig. 'Shure an' it's meself can do the stip,' said Burke. 'Horoo!' and he waved his imaginary shillelagh. 'By the Howly Poker, we'll dance a hole in the flure! Arrah now! stip out, me darlint. Horoo!' and he jigged about, dragging Florence after him until he dropped exhausted upon a couch.

The good humour of the wild Irishman was infectious. Eleanor and Whitby danced also, while peering cautiously through the portières could be seen the dusky faces of the servants, staring in scandalised astonishment at the young Sahibs, feeling more than ever confirmed in their opinion that they, like all other English people, were certainly mad. It needed youth and overpowering animal spirits to dance with joyous light-heartedness in such hot weather.

CHAPTER XXI.

EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGES.

'Who on earth do you think has returned to Delhi?' exclaimed Ensign Burke, rushing impetuously into the garden where his *fiancée* and Captain and Mrs. Whitby were assembled. 'Why, Carew of all people in the world,' he continued excitedly, 'and he says he has come back on business!'

Florence only remarked 'How strange!' and did not seem much interested in the matter. Eleanor was silent, but a strange and rather bitter smile crossed her handsome face.

'Carew returned! The designing villain!' exclaimed Captain Whitby hotly, in a fit of honest indignation.

'Designing villain!' said Burke, 'rather strong words for you to use—and why?'

Whitby's countenance in general wore a calm expression, but the anger and scorn depicted on it, and reflected from his flashing eyes, showed that he was deeply moved.

'The fact is,' he said with unusual warmth, 'I cannot

stand by and see a silly woman like Louisa Page led astray by Carew ; I cannot forget that I have known her from her childhood, and that she is utterly friendless ; for her old father is now absolutely imbecile, and, therefore, no fit protection for her. That man is planning to run away with her, and this is the fine "business," indeed, upon which Carew has come back to Delhi.'

Whitby was one of the little band of plain livers and noble thinkers who keep morality alive, and the world on its upward way. He had hitherto not spoken about having found the lovers at Gazighur dâk bungalow, nor revealed that he had brought Louisa back to her home ; but Carew's unjustifiable return to Delhi he considered had released him from his promise of silence.

Whitby's auditors were amazed, for they now heard for the first time the probable explanation of Reginald Carew's re-appearance among them, when everyone thought that he had left for England. It is needless to say that the two ladies were indignant at the news.

Florence looked at Whitby in childish astonishment ; by race and education she was one of those good women—'women of honour' as the last century styled them—and she could not understand that one of her sex should fail in the duty of a wife ; Louisa's conduct seemed incredible to her.

'Are you perfectly sure, Dick?' asked Eleanor, with a scornful smile, 'that "Unlimited Loo" was about to outrage society by eloping with Carew? If she had run away openly in the face of day, and taken the consequences, it would have been endurable ; but I know Louisa would never do that.'

'Eleanor!' said Whitby in consternation, 'what do you mean?'

'Only this,' she said, blushing crimson as she spoke, for to her reserved nature it was painful to express openly what she felt so deeply, 'only this: it seems to me to be a far more honest action to go away openly, than to continue a life of sham, hypocrisy and deceit. I, too, have known Louisa from her childhood, and believe her to be utterly incapable of acting in a straightforward manner under any circumstances. Don't think I am spiteful and ill-natured,' she remonstrated, 'but she seems to have blighted my whole

life by one act of treachery. If I had never liked her I could not feel as bitterly as I do now. It was through her pretending friendship for me that she reached my brother, whom she never loved, but married only because she believed him to be the heir to a fine estate.'

The revelation of the frustrated elopement came upon Burke like a thunder-clap. Louisa was pretty and amusing; certainly she had allowed him to kiss her in the dark corners of the garden when no one was near, and had expressed a partiality for him which flattered his vanity, yet he could hardly believe that she, Wake's wife, had tried to elope with his cousin Carew! Despite his astonishment he could not prevent a certain sense of amusement from taking possession of his mind. Carew had trained her to *this*. *This* was the result of the syllabus of education which Carew had propounded of metaphysics, ethics, and general enlightenment, all to end in a vulgar scandal. 'Oh! what a falling off was there.'

'You take it very quietly, Burke,' said Whitby; 'but you brought Carew here, and now you seem quite content that he should bring disgrace into my wife's family; I call his conduct abominable.'

'But are you certain of what you say? Of course I know he always admired Unlimited Loo, and has been constant to her for years; and I know he wished to act honourably, and intended to marry her. Loo ought not to have sailed under false colours, pretending to be an unmarried girl.'

'As he is your relation you must know that it will not add to his happiness to run away with another man's wife,' said Whitby.

'Oh,' answered Burke, 'Carew wouldn't listen to me; he is infatuated about Louisa—absolutely off his head; and she is not a bad sort altogether.'

'Get him to leave India sharp,' cried Whitby; 'there is nothing like change of air for these intrigues, and I will telegraph to Wake and tell him to come here at once. He ought to look after his wife himself.'

Burke mounted his pony; to ride two miles to the walled city, to clatter at a hand-gallop through the streets of the crowded bazaars, and finally to draw up at a long, one-storied building, was only the work of half an hour, and then Burke inquired for the traveller, 'Carew Sahib.' He was

shown into a comfortless room, where he found the Essex squire in his shirt-sleeves, writing at a square table under a punkah which was being violently agitated. He looked up with an exclamation more of surprise than pleasure, on seeing his cousin.

‘It’s beastly hot,’ said the Ensign awkwardly; ‘I advise you to get out of this as soon as you can, for the heat is becoming decidedly unbearable, and you look ill too.’

‘Ah, yes! I had intended to leave by the last steamer, you are aware, but I unfortunately missed it, so I have returned to Delhi to complete my business,’ answered Carew, equally awkwardly. ‘That Whitby is a d——d interfering fellow,’ he continued. ‘He has told you of our meeting at the Gazighur dāk bungalow. I see it in your face.’

‘Why, yes, he has,’ answered the Ensign hesitatingly.

‘Doubtless he has chosen to put a bad construction upon my escorting Miss Page to Meerut?’

‘Well, it was rather peculiar for you to be travelling alone with Wake’s wife, you know.’

Carew’s brow contracted with a look of almost physical pain.

‘He has spread that report about, I suppose?’

‘No,’ answered Burke, ‘it is not generally known; but naturally I am now looked upon as one of the family, and they have no secrets from me.’

The real reason of the squire’s return to Delhi (although he did not enlighten Burke on the subject) was that Louisa had telegraphed to him to come back. She wished to exculpate herself in his eyes; and she, moreover, shrewdly thought his presence in Delhi would silence any possible imputation of her having gone away in his company.

‘My friendship for Miss Page is purely Platonic,’ said the squire pompously. ‘I repudiate the ill-natured aspersions of malicious people. Her case is a very peculiar one, is it not? and would touch any sensitive heart.’

‘She is very pretty,’ answered Burke evasively, ‘and rattling good fun.’

‘I propose to take her to England under her father’s care—that is quite proper—and I then place her with my mother; no one can say a word against that. Louisa is the best and purest of women, and I defy calumny; besides, then I can complete her education.’

‘Do you still intend to carry out your scheme of training her, then?’

‘Yes. As I think I have told you before, it naturally occurs to me that if I require my carriage, boat, writing-table, or easy-chair, I have it manufactured after a fashion peculiarly mine own; much more ought I to take care that my wife, the most important of a man’s goods—if she be a good—be cut out according to my views.’

‘But a wife is not a block of wood?’

‘Certainly not. I even go so far as to assert that she has a soul, which is denied in the East, and doubted even by Europeans. I have great faith in education; I believe that the mind—especially that of woman—is pliant and susceptible of being moulded into various shapes, according to the pressure exercised upon it from without, and this can be effected with much greater certainty than is commonly supposed.’

‘And how do you intend to set to work?’

‘In the following simple manner. I wish to have the young lady altogether in my hands, metaphorically speaking, for at least a year before I marry her, and wish to put her into a position in which I can still observe her mental organization and pursue my course of training without her suspecting my design. Then if I find that I fail—if I find that impenetrable obstacles exist, or if she fall in love with another man—it will be evident that she was not intended by nature to be my wife. If I succeed, and find that she reciprocates my ideas, and sympathises generally with my habits of thought, shall I not have a thousand better chances of securing domestic happiness than by marrying under the mere slavish influence of infatuation, without really knowing anything of the character, I mean physiological, not simply moral, of my bride?’

‘This sounds all very well,’ said Burke; ‘but you seem quite to forget that Louisa is another man’s wife.’

‘A mere legal fiction, my dear fellow, which can be easily set aside, and has nothing to do with the main issue. Louisa assures me that her marriage is informal. You will now see how the idea of my taking her to England came about. I had discovered the father’s weakness, with which, of course, you are acquainted, and also that neither of them appears to have any ties of kindred, or other connections.

Louisa seems to be only anxious to take her parent to some quiet place, in the hope, doubtless, that he may get rid of his remarkable mental delusion. It happens, fortunately, that a small house of mine, in the little town of Hurst Hill (where my property lies), is vacant ; it also happens that the doctor there has had some experience of mad people, and generally has a mild lunatic or two under his care. I offered my house to them, and there they are going.'

'What! do you mean to say that Major Page and Louisa are to reside at Hurst Hill as your tenants?'

'Yes. Perhaps you may remember the house, an old-fashioned affair of plaster, interlaced with dark beams of carved woodwork about it, and that sort of thing. It stands near the middle of the little town ; it is a nice little place though, with a garden behind, and a fine view.'

'Well, this is strange!' ejaculated Burke.

'I do not see anything strange in this occurrence,' said Carew. 'What can be more simple or more natural, or evince a more logical sequence of events? I see a young girl in Dublin, and admire her for her appearance alone ; I meet her again here, and find she is pre-eminently teachable ; I adhere to my scheme ; that is clear enough. But I wish further to remark that you seem to have cut poor Louisa lately, and she feels it very acutely, especially now that the Whitbys are saying things derogatory to her fair fame. Remember she may be your relation by marriage, and, as she will be leaving India approximately, I think you should go to bid her farewell.'

Burke knew well enough that it would be wise to say 'No' to this proposal, but it is not given to all mortals to say the important word at the right moment ; and although he loved Florence, he did not see why he should drop, with seeming unkindness, so beautiful an acquaintance as Miss Page.

'What harm is there in the girl?' he reasoned. 'She flourished upon flirtation like a fly upon sugar. Her nature panted for adoration like a flower for water ; but these were feminine weaknesses to be admired, not condemned ; for was it not the creed of the 200th Regiment to "Flirt and let flirt"?''

There is a time in the history of most of us when the mind takes a sudden awakening, and we enter into a new

order of thought, rarely knowing how or when this happens. This time had not yet come to Burke, who was still young and unthinking, and who accepted, more than most men, glitter for gold. When, among the sterner scenes which followed, it came, it came—not as to many, by gradual experience—but in awful letters of fire, bringing regret and bitter contrition. Alas! poor blind mortals that we are! would that some god would enable us to foresee! For ignorance of cause and motive is the true serpent by which women are ruined and men deceived.

But before venturing to visit ‘Dalilah,’ Burke felt it would be better to obtain the consent of his promised bride to do so; therefore he hastened back to Florence.

‘It’s all right, Florence,’ he said; ‘the Whitbys are too hard upon Carew and Louisa. She is rapid, of course, but nothing worse, and Carew is very anxious for me to say good-bye to her. She is going to England with her paternal guardian. Now, I won’t go if you would rather I did not.’

‘Oh, I am glad that things can be explained, dear.’

‘Shall I go, Florence? I will do just as you like.’

‘I will not begin life, Desmond, by being jealous of you. I can afford to be generous, and I am sorry that she has made such an unhappy marriage, poor thing!’

Burke, whose conscience was quieted by his cousin’s explanation and Florence’s acquiescence, again mounted his pony and proceeded to visit the young lady at the Red House.

‘Poor girl!’ he said to himself, shrugging his shoulders; ‘with such a father and husband it is no wonder she is rather peculiar.’

On reaching the Red House he found that Major Page was about to take his daughter for a drive in his buggy, but he had been interrupted by a matter requiring his immediate attention. His daughter was just beginning to pout at Destiny for thus interfering with her pleasure, when the Ensign arrived.

‘Oh, here is Mr. Burke,’ said the parent; ‘perhaps he will escort you. I was about to take my daughter for a drive, Mr. Burke; but I am wanted for some business which must be settled at once. Will you take my place? She you will drive may be Princess of the Isles some day, you know,’ he added in a whisper.

'If Miss Page will take me for a companion, I shall be delighted,' said the Ensign gallantly.

'And Miss Page will be happy to take you,' said the young lady.

Between the distraction not unnatural at finding himself wedged in a buggy with a creature of whose attractions he felt considerably afraid, and the remembrance of the scene in the Whitbys' garden, with the accusations made against Louisa, his abstraction led to a lack of skill as a Jehu, and he managed the animal so badly that Louisa dispossessed him of the reins with a laugh, after he had nearly upset the vehicle in a ditch. With a firm grasp of the reins, her bright eyes kindling, she urged on the not unwilling horse, and in this combination of high spirit and womanly gentleness the Ensign fancied he recognised one of those characters born to enthrall mankind.

'How wonderfully discerning Carew had been in Dublin five years before!'

'In a short time I shall leave this place,' said Burke; 'and I have been very happy here.'

'But you will be glad to return to England, will you not?' she asked.

'I ought to be, at all events, for I am going there after my marriage to the girl to whom I am engaged.'

'Are you really? Oh, Mr. Burke, let me congratulate you! I'm sure I hope you will be very happy. Miss Rawley is so pretty.'

'Yes,' answered Burke; 'and very good.'

'Oh, how nice! I like good girls so much. Heigho! how happy she will be!'

As they were ascending a gentle incline, the quadruped sank into a jog-trot; and Miss Page, seemingly taking no more interest in quickening his pace, let the reins hang loosely and looked dejected.

'Oh, Mr. Burke,' she said pleadingly, 'you won't be angry with me, will you? But if ever I get back to dear old England, you will let me know your wife, won't you? She has been prejudiced against me very unjustly by those who ought to have known better; but I feel that I should like her to be my sister. I am very foolish; but I have no one to love except papa, and I should so like to have a sister. You know, we are very old friends now'

‘Then I am to be your brother, Miss Page?’

‘Oh, brothers should not be so formal. Call me Louisa.’

‘Louisa, then, may I talk to you a little about my friend Carew?’

‘Yes, if you want to, but I’d rather you would talk to me about yourself, Desmond. May I call you so, in spite of our little quarrel? Do you know, I have thought of a favour I should like to ask. Will you write to me from dear England?—will you write so that I shall get the letter on my birthday? I’ve an absurd fancy for receiving letters on my birthday. It’s the 23rd of October.’

‘I will write with pleasure,’ answered the Ensign; ‘but you will be in England before that.’

‘I may not; and if I am to stay here it will make me so happy, if you will keep your promise, and we shall always be friends. I value your friendship above everything—you will never forget me?’

The proud and bright girl of a few moments before had changed into a tender being, nestling at the Ensign’s side, who felt himself insensibly yielding to her subtle fascinations. It was a hard fight between the memory of an absent love, and the present witchery of a pretty girl seated by him. Indeed, there is no saying to what this drive might not have led, had not some other personages come upon the scene.

There, advancing along the road to meet them, was an object which had the effect of freeing the Ensign’s individuality from the spells which were being rapidly woven round it. This was no other than the Whitbys’ carriage, with Mrs. Whitby and Florence seated in it. They passed the buggy with cold, averted looks; but Florence turned faint and sick, for through her heart there ran a fierce throb of jealousy, painful as a blow, or even death itself. It was true that Burke had called on Louisa, with her permission; but that he, her affianced husband, should drive in a buggy on the public Mall with that noted flirt was not what she had anticipated. Poor child! she bravely determined not to be jealous, although her lovely eyes were full of tears, which she could not repress.

‘Oh, you will catch it, Desmond,’ said Louisa, with a mocking laugh, as the Whitbys’ carriage drove by, ‘you will

get it hot and strong. How those women hate me, although I have done them no harm.'

The rest of the drive passed in comparative silence, and soon afterwards Burke deposited his fair companion at the paternal mansion, and then hurried away to dress for the mess dinner, to which he had been invited that evening. It must be owned that the too susceptible Ensign was not sorry that he should not see Florence until the next morning, when probably a night's sleep would have cooled down any passing annoyance which vexed her gentle soul, for he well knew that resentment and anger in her sweet nature were never of long continuance.

Florence's visit at Delhi had been unconscionably long; but while Burke remained there, too ill to be moved, she could not make up her mind to return to her father, and leave the man whom she adored.

Life was to Florence and her lover an untried country, whose difficulties and perils were to be met with the sole aid of a few instincts and a few maxims. It had no meaning beyond the pleasures of to-day, for the tragic side of existence did not concern them at all. Burke's scheme of life was to laugh, dance and jest; and if evil came, why think of it? Why meet trouble half-way?

Although they were much of an age, Florence's feeling towards Eleanor was one of admiring reverence—the regard which a child might have for a person older, sadder, wiser, and infinitely better than herself.

CHAPTER XXII.

SPECTRE-STRICKEN.

HENRY WAKE had never, from birth, been of the prosaic and practical Anglo-Saxon type. His pale complexion, wild dark eyes, marked features, and spare frame, all indicated a descent from a Cornish, and possibly Celtic, line of ancestry. His youth had been passed in the solitude of the great wastes of Dartmoor, and from infancy even he had heard the primitive traditions of a simple-minded peasantry. Both from physical organization and order of mind, he was what would be called superstitious. People had asserted that the Wakes were all mad; they were undoubtedly

eccentric; but call it insanity, hallucination, or use the modern psychological term, and say that Wake was 'a sensitive,' the fact remains that from childhood he saw, or thought he saw, things hidden from grosser eyes. Having broken with the conventional world, having been shipwrecked in love and hope, and now living in utter isolation in the solitudes of dense forests and unpeopled wastes (attended only by a few servants), this inherited tendency to belief in occult influences became a monomania.

Moreover, his conscience awoke with overpowering force to the fact that two men had fallen by his hand, and his morbid thoughts accused him of being a murderer. The 'flattering unction' which he had hitherto laid to his soul, that his victims had deserved their fate, and that he had slain them only in self-defence, no longer brought him consolation. His sleep became troubled by frightful dreams, in which the distorted and hideous old fakir continually appeared to him, with angry, threatening gestures—his repulsive face convulsed with diabolical hatred. Then, also, he would often see the Thug whom he had shot in the ruins of Secro, who, while seemingly gazing upon Wake, would piteously murmur the pathetic lament, 'Oh, my home! oh, my children!' Then, at times, a slender, graceful, white-robed form would glide beside his couch, presenting to his view the beautiful statuesque face of Moti, appearing to be clasping her infant in her arms. This last was a gentle shade, whose features wore an air of celestial calm, and sometimes she was accompanied by the finely-proportioned form of the youthful hunter Gopal.

Eventually Wake not only saw these figures in his dreams, but they seemed to haunt his daily life. As he walked along, or sat solitary in his tent, a white mist would seem to rise from the ground, and out of this ephemeral vapour these forms would appear; they came by no effort of his will, neither could he cause them to disappear.

Among the spoil which Wake had removed from Secro on his first expedition was that large stone which he had believed to be a diamond, but which proved to be a crystal, supposed to be endowed with magical power, and which he had taken from the dying grasp of the Thug. Seeing this amulet lying neglected in Louisa's room at the Red House, Wake had taken possession of it, and wore it constantly on

his person. Whether this fact had anything to do with his remarkable experiences occultists must decide, but Wake himself always believed in the supernatural power of this crystal or charm.

An extraordinary change came over his whole view of life, and it seemed as if his mind had undergone an utter transformation; he no longer cared to acquire money, he no longer wished to recover his ancestral estates, he no longer hoped to regain the affection of his wife, whose bitter words, 'I hate you! I wish to be free!' rankled in his heart, causing an envenomed wound. 'Let her be free,' he thought; 'let her have the money. And he even viewed with indifference the fact that another had supplanted him in her love. This phase of feeling was not so much due to the mysterious influences by which he seemed surrounded, as to the fact that the old glamour was dispelled, and he no longer believed in Louisa.

The woman he had loved was beautiful, always elegant in appearance, always witty and entertaining, and he had believed, despite a 'spitfire disposition,' as he called her hot temper, that she was truthful and noble in character; but now, now at last, the duplicity and heartlessness of Louisa's nature was clear to him, and the spectacle disgusted him.

With all Wake's faults he detested lying and deceit, possessing, as he did, the chivalrous traditions of a race who had never counted among their numbers either cowards or liars. 'Let her take the wealth and begone!' his hot, unmercenary heart cried out under the torture of betrayed affection and disappointed hope. In securing the treasure of Secro he had sinned in causing the death of innocent people, and the money was ill-gotten gain; there was the stain of blood upon it; he would have none of it.

Wake had been wandering about from camping-ground to camping-ground, and found himself at Secro, the attraction there being the quantities of game to be found in the great jeel of Nujufghur, within reach of that place. Besides, these ruins, in his loneliness, seemed to have a special fascination for him. As he paced along the massive walls of the old castle, memory would recall that happy time when, with Louisa at his side, he had been full of hope and satisfied ambition. He recalled, too, the old Major with his mental absurdities, the handsome light-hearted Burke, the per-

petually grumbling Maunders, the noble-looking Willoughby, and the burly Squire Carew, with his didactic pomposity : all were gone, but the memory of their presence in this ancient castle haunted him almost as much as the unreal spectres which pursued him night and day.

He was in the court-yard of the ruined castle, and noticed with surprise that the heap of stones which formerly guarded the entrance to the hidden wealth of Ali Kareem had been removed, and that the staircase was open to all who chose to enter. Actuated more by curiosity than any other motive, he descended the steps and entered the place whence he had removed the treasure which he had thought would have brought him happiness. For a moment he stood, lost in painful thought, when a light touch upon his arm put an end to his reflections. He hastily turned round, and beheld the Witch of Megara !

It was now the hour of dusk, but a curious green light, probably arising from the beams of the setting sun, illumined the whole place, and, falling upon the white summer robe of the old woman, gave her so unnatural an appearance that Wake hardly realized whether she belonged to the real world, or that phantasmagoria of hallucination in which he had lately lived.

The witch emitted her usual cackling laugh as he started back in evident terror at the unexpected sight.

‘Do not fear me, Sahib,’ she said ; ‘I am but an old woman, and one who is no enemy to you.’

This curious form of salutation left Wake too surprised to answer at once.

‘Are not the secrets of the heart known to me?’ she continued. ‘Sahib, you are not a bad man for an Englishman. Your heart is not wicked ; but your temper resembles a fire of thorns, which blazes up fiercely in an instant.’

‘What do you require of me?’ asked Wake, fancying from her words that she had come to beg.

‘No, no,’ she answered, as if reading his thought. ‘The old woman asks not money from the Sahib. She will soon be rich—more rich than words can say, when the reign of the Kings is restored, and that happy time is even now at hand,’ and she laughed triumphantly.

‘What do you want with me?’ again demanded Wake.

‘I come to warn the Sahib. Nothing in this world is

lost. Does not the influence of good or evil actions last for ever? Though the Sahib is an infidel, yet even in the mansions of hostility there are good men who shall one day breathe the "fragrance of the garden" (Paradise), for is it not written that even on the unbelievers Allah will sometimes have mercy?"

Wake was more than ever perplexed by this rhapsody.

'The Sahib understands not,' said the sibyl, again divining his thought. 'The old woman knows. It has been revealed to her that not many dark actions have stained that white book in which the life of the Sahib is written. He has gained honour in this world and salvation in that which is to come. Has he not befriended the helpless and unprotected? Can the dead speak? They have spoken, and Moti bids the Sahib leave this land and return to his own country; then all may be well with him. But if the Sahib despises the warning, then he will perish miserably, like the rest of his countrymen; for in the life of the Sahib there is neither aim nor love,' she continued, 'only the courage of despair.'

'The recklessness of despair,' thought Wake, who marvelled at the skill with which she had divined the workings of his tortured mind.

'Ah!' cried the witch excitedly, her shrill voice ringing through the vaulted chamber. 'What evil fate made the Sahib meddle with the thrice-accursed treasure of this place? Every rupee of that gold was wrung by a tyrant from the poor, despite their tears and groans. It is written that while one tittle of that ill-gotten money remains with the Sahib his life shall be accursed. Is it not the will of Allah that the oppressed shall be avenged? Sahib, it is Moti, Moti who is dead, who speaks to you from beyond the grave.' Again Wake marvelled that his vague impressions of the evil nature of the treasure should be so singularly confirmed by the words of this mysterious old woman. 'But it has been decreed by Fate—and who can withstand Destiny?—that the ill-acquired hoards of Ali Kareem shall at last pass into the hands of a woman, who will use the treasures for good, and not for evil; and then, but not till then, shall the curse pass away. There is danger to the rule of the English,' she went on. 'Does not the Sahib feel it in the air, like the approach of a thunder-storm? Let the Sahib learn wisdom; let him fly from danger while there is yet time.'

The words 'danger to the English' brought Wake back at once into the every-day world, and a smile of scornful disdain curled his lips.

The Witch of Megara gazed at him for a moment, and then, extending her long lean arm, she described a circle, saying, 'Sahib, behold futurity!' and then, as though in a flash of light, he saw passing before him a terrible pageant of despair, in which he and all he loved on earth played so lamentable a part that his heart beat wildly, and his knees knocked together in an unaccustomed terror. The revelation vanished in an instant; but the feature in it which most impressed Wake was the seemingly dead body of an Englishwoman, entirely divested of clothing, being dragged by her long golden hair by beings whom he scarcely recognised as human—for to him they wore the semblance of fiends. The face of the prostrate form was turned from him, but a horrible conviction seized him that he beheld the dishonoured corpse of his wife. He had believed that he no longer cared for her; but now, from the violence of his passionate indignation, he knew that she was still dear to him. 'You must save her,' someone seemed to whisper in his ear. He turned to interrogate the Witch of Megara further; but she was gone, as mysteriously and noiselessly as she had come.

He tried to collect his disturbed faculties, but he could not divest himself of the idea that he had received a warning which he must not disobey. Some overpowering calamity threatened Louisa, he knew not what, and, in spite of his formed resolve that he would never seek her again, he determined to hasten to Delhi, so as to be near her should danger threaten.

The sudden darkness of the semi-tropics had now fallen upon the still ruins, while on the night-wind was borne the hideous outcries of the jackals that infested them. In a fever of impatience Wake ordered his horse to be saddled, and then, throwing himself across the back of his swift Arab, rode headlong through the semi-deserted wastes, hardly drawing rein until he reached the trim villas and gardens of the English cantonments at Delhi.

In the cool gray dawn he alighted at the door of his sister's house, who, on seeing him, was much shocked at his wan, haggard appearance. She at once ordered break-

fast, which Wake, after his wild night's ride, was glad to receive. He dared not tell his sister the presentiment of coming evil which possessed him. It was a thing which could neither be explained nor reasoned about.

'I have come,' he said, 'to try and persuade my wife to return with me to England. We are rich now, and there is nothing to keep us here.'

His sister looked at him in perplexity.

'You are in a very false position,' she said. 'It seems wicked to recommend it, but why do not you make your life apart from that artful creature? You can never make her happy, and she will render you miserable.'

'When all else is lost, duty and honour still remain,' said Wake. 'Louisa is unlike us—she is frivolous and pleasure-loving; but if I had been more gentle and cautious, I might have led, where I have vainly striven to drive.'

Eleanor kissed his broad white forehead, and smoothed back the clustering dark curls which fell over it.

'Poor old fellow!' she said gently. 'Do you remember our lately seeing a camel and a bullock ploughing together? It reminded me of your ill-assorted marriage.'

Wake could not help laughing.

'Which am I, Nell, the camel or the bullock?'

'I don't know, dear,' she answered. 'I only know that you deserve a nobler destiny than being tied to Louisa.'

'You are always down on her, poor thing!' and he shuddered as he recalled that horrible vision. 'She might have been a better woman had she mated with a wiser man.'

'It is generous and sweet of you to say so,' she replied, though his words found no echo in her heart. She believed Louisa to be irreclaimable, because false to the core, and marvelled, as common-sense has often done before and since, how easily the nobler sex can be deceived by pretty silliness and airs of assumed innocence.

'Eleanor,' said Wake, speaking with evident effort, 'you have been ambitious on my account. You have thought that we might once more build up our family name with the treasure of Secro. Banish the idea from your mind for ever, for that money is the price of blood; it is accursed. Let our name die out with me, and all the follies of our race be forgotten.'

She looked at him in sad surprise; it was not easy for

her to give up the dream of her life; but when she saw his wildly-gleaming eyes, his strange air, the feeling came over her, with sickening dread, that the inherited curse of insanity had at length fallen upon him. She did not attempt to reason with him, for she knew it was useless; she only kissed him, saying quietly, 'Come what will, dear, we will try to do right; pride and ambition are the besetting sins of ruined gentry like us. But what will you do with the treasure?'

'I shall make a free gift of it to my wife, if she will take it. I am now going to tell her of this. Louisa is so wedded to money that she would not care to part with the wealth of Ali Kareem, even if I wished it.'

He had sent a servant beforehand to prepare Louisa for his visit, and soon afterwards he was in her presence. Louisa had retired to her own apartment, and after exchanging her out-door toilette for a loose dressing-gown, was awaiting her husband's arrival in anxious thought. Guilt is always nervous, and she felt persuaded that Whitby had recalled him in consequence of her having left Delhi with Carew. A loud knock upon the window-shutters of her room roused her from her reverie, and for a second she felt startled, for certainly the noises in the Red House were very strange and inexplicable; but she soon recovered her self-possession and called to her ayah to open the Venetian blinds. In the dark veranda stood Wake, who had come secretly because, after that last scandalous quarrel with Louisa, he had not cared to be seen by the domestics.

'Why have you come?' Louisa asked ungraciously.

He carefully closed the door as well as the Venetians to the French windows of the room.

'Louisa,' he said, 'will you pay attention to what I say? I have come to tell you something that you will hardly believe—there is some magic in that crystal.'

'Oh! you have it then. I lost it, but supposed it had been stolen.'

'I saw it lying about, and knowing that you did not value it, I took it away with me. I always wear it, which perhaps is the reason that I have seen such inexplicable things, for I have had a vision of something so unreal, so utterly ghastly, that it appalled me.'

'Nonsense! I expect you had been drinking. But what did you see?'

‘It concerns you, and showed me but, there, never mind details; it is enough that I was so impressed with what I have seen that I have travelled all night to take you away from this place. Whitby sent me a telegram, but before it had arrived I had made up my mind to start, so it only hastened my movements.’

‘Where will you take me?’ she asked coldly.

‘Straight back to England, and we might start this very night. Get ready at once; I will have post-horses laid, and everything prepared; moreover, I make you a free gift of every farthing I have in the world, and all the treasure hidden here and elsewhere.’

‘Henry Wake, you are mad!’

‘There are some presentiments which are stronger than sober reason. Leave with me to-night, I beg, Louisa; only do this, and you shall be free ever after to go where you like. I repeat, I have had a supernatural warning.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ she answered stoutly; ‘it is only a trick to get me into your power.’

But, as she spoke, her lips trembled and her eyes dilated with uncontrollable terror, for the strain of Indian blood in her veins made her superstitious as well as untruthful. Uncivilized races, as they are called, living always in close proximity with nature, have cultivated their spiritual faculties, while civilized nations have become more material; in India many persons live a life beyond the physical, wherein the unseen is all-powerful.

‘No, Louisa, it is no trick; I only want to take you away from certain peril.’

‘But my father?’ she asked.

‘He can either accompany us or follow under the care of the servants. Come, Louisa,’ he continued, seeing her still hesitating, ‘time presses. However, if you do not believe the warning, there is another reason why I should take you away from Delhi. They say,’ he continued, his brow darkening, and speaking in a broken voice, ‘that Carew would steal you from me.’

There was something so unlike Wake in the weird-looking gaunt hunter before her that Louisa was alarmed, and began to cry.

‘You ought not to come and frighten me like this,’ she sobbed. ‘What ails me? I am hysterical and silly, and you had better leave me now.’

‘I will not force my society upon you if it is unpleasant to you; but, Louisa, if we never meet again, remember that I have loved you as few women have ever been loved. Remember, dear, that I beg your pardon for all I have ever done to grieve you; my temper is bad, and, for some unknown reason, I am never so irritable with others as with you. Forgive me, dearest. My pride might prevent my saying this at any other time, for you never have returned my affection. Believe me, Louisa, should we ever come together again, I would behave differently. If you could only care for me a little, and not flirt with other men!’

Louisa looked very lovely. The half-frightened and sobered expression of her countenance only increased its charm.

‘What do you mean!’ she asked; ‘why are you saying all this? Whitby has been telling you stories about me.’

He kissed her white hand over and over again.

‘I can never be prejudiced against you, dearest,’ he said, ‘never; but come away with me at once.’

‘I cannot,’ she answered; ‘but I will to-morrow, or soon.’

‘You will?’ he asked, with sudden joy.

‘Yes, Harry, I will.’

‘Promise it faithfully.’

‘I promise—honour bright; but go away now,’ she added; ‘I am so frightened and excited.’

‘My place is to guard you, dearest. Why should I leave you if you are terrified?’

‘But you frighten me,’ she said; and then, traitor-like, she kissed him. (The Judases of all times betray with a kiss.)

‘You are not a bad fellow after all,’ she added coaxingly.

‘But you prefer that big brute Carew to me,’ he said savagely.

Louisa, well trained in the ways of concealment, answered in the gayest and lightest of tones:

‘Do you think, knowing me as you do, that I wish to change one tyrant for another? Still, Carew is a man of good family, and will be useful to get us into high society after our return to England. Of course he admires me, but so do others; I am tired of telling you this.’

‘These are the words always on your lips, Louisa—society and admiration. I never hear you speak of love, or honour, or duty.’

She shrugged her pretty shoulders, and laughed lightly as she replied : ‘ On the contrary, I cannot live without love, and oh ! I should like to live in a pretty house with you, if you will promise to behave better !’

This is what she said ; but in her heart she thought that to live in a house, and undergo the horrors of dulness and domesticity with Wake, would be imprisonment for life, in the custody of an unloved gaoler. She was too sharp-witted to say so, however. ‘ What economy is necessary in telling lies ?’ asks an Indian proverb, which she had taken to heart and always acted upon. ‘ But go now, please,’ she added ; ‘ I am so tired and sleepy.’

The truth was that she expected a visit from Carew, and dreaded the probable meeting of the two men.

‘ You will be ready to leave this time to-morrow ?’ he asked.

‘ Yes.’

‘ You mean it ?’ demanded Wake, trying to read her beautiful but inscrutable face.

‘ Yes, yes ; I have given you my word—what more do you want ?’

Before Wake left he said :

‘ Be careful ; let no one see Ali Kareem’s jewels ; and, whatever you do, do not attempt to sell them in India—it is too risky.’

Another moment and he was gone ; and Louisa, her fears somewhat lessened, sat down and tried to think over the meaning of the trying scene she had just gone through. What puzzled her most was how she should manage to elude Wake and go to England with Carew. To find that, despite all that had passed, she still retained her hold on Wake’s affection, flattered her vanity and love of power ; but her only objects in life were wealth, society, and universal admiration. She knew, with the keen insight of a selfish nature, what would be most to her advantage, and felt convinced that Wake would be terribly in her way in the glorious life of amusement, wealth, and liberty which she had planned for herself in England. ‘ For his temper and jealousy were dreadful,’ she reasoned.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALI KAREEM'S JEWELS.

THE day following Wake's unexpected visit to his wife, Carew again called at the Red House, and was immediately ushered into the drawing-room, where Louisa, who had been reclining on a couch, rose to receive him. The woman whom the squire truly loved, or rather, graciously patronized, stood before him, a picture of girlish grace and beauty, her fair curly hair enshrining her delicate face like the halo of a saint, while her smiling gray eyes looked gladly into his own. After accepting her cordial invitation to dinner that evening he said :

'I hope Major Page is quite ready?'

'Yes, at last,' she answered; 'but I have had some trouble with him, poor dear! Ah, Reginald! you should have known him five years ago; he was very different then.'

'Good advice and a cool climate will soon put him right, I have no doubt, Louisa. And now, as our arrangements seem complete, there is nothing to prevent our immediate departure from this land of rupees, luxury, and heat.'

And he threw himself languidly into an easy-chair.

Carew and Louisa had determined that it would be a mistake to fly madly in the face of society. An open scandal, a horrible divorce suit, were the vulgar and disagreeable experience of stupid people. The only sin in Louisa's code of morals was the sin of being found out, and, whatever happened, she would still walk 'in fear of Mrs. Grundy,' in which pious resolve she was seconded by the squire.

After a short pause, Louisa said suddenly :

'As my father is incapable of transacting business, I wonder if you could get Dilam Parshad to buy, or at least to value, this jewellery? It is very old-fashioned,' she continued, 'and I would rather have the money.' As she spoke she took some curious-looking articles from a small box which lay upon the table. 'Do you understand precious stones? What should you think these Indian things are worth?'

Carew examined the things. The first articles he took up were some ear-rings, or rather a collection of ear-rings, for the native custom is to crowd a number of bells over and

around the ear. Then he looked at a necklace, and after that an aigrette for a turban. All these ornaments were thickly set with what appeared to be large pieces of glass, but an expert might have known that they were absolutely diamonds, rubies and emeralds.

‘I cannot tell whether the stones are real or not,’ he answered; ‘you perceive that they are cut without facets, not set like English jewellery.’

‘Don’t you think they are real?’ she again asked.

‘They may be genuine, and if so must be worth a great deal of money. I little thought my Princess had such a dowry. These things are of artistic and beautiful workmanship,’ he added. He now examined some small boxes, cups, and a sword-hilt of jade exquisitely cut, and encrusted with glittering stones.

‘I have seen jade-work of this sort in Delhi,’ he went on, ‘but never finer specimens. Where did you get them, Louisa?’

‘Oh,’ she answered carelessly, ‘my great-grandfather collected this sort of thing, and they have been in our family for a hundred years at least. I have told you, Reggie, that I shall be immensely rich some day, only my father’s incapacity and my ignorance of business stand in the way just now. I hate being poor; it is odious. I mean to cut a dash in England, and when I am in London I shall get into the best set.’

‘The size of these stones is enormous,’ said Carew; ‘and if they should be real you might become known by your jewels. They are so dirty-looking, however, and the settings so tarnished, that none but an experienced person could have any idea of their value; but I am afraid they are only paste.’

‘Perhaps you are mistaken, Reggie, and yet I don’t know, for I once had a fine large stone which everyone thought was a diamond, but it turned out to be a crystal, a magic crystal.’

‘Where is it? It is strange how the superstition about crystals prevails among all races. The fact is, rock crystal naturally contains more electricity than most substances, but whether or not the old occultists knew of electricity is a secret hidden from us.’

‘Oh! that is the reason of its magic, is it? Well, I did

not value the stone much, and was careless about it; how stupid of me to lose it! But, Reginald, sell all this trash if you can: if I wear jewels, I should like modern ones.'

'You need no ornaments, certainly; your youth and beauty are sufficient.'

'Go, flatterer,' she laughed; 'but really I should like to have this matter settled one way or the other, and to know what they are worth.'

'Oh! most certainly; I shall be delighted to do anything for you, and will get them valued in Delhi,' said Carew. ever ready to gratify Louisa's wishes. 'If they should be worth, let us say twenty thousand pounds, how charming that would be!'

Carew had not a trace of jealousy, revenge, nor even spite in his character; his fibre being too soft for any of the darker passions. As far as his indolent good nature would allow, he held a very bad opinion of Wake; first, because he had enlisted as a common soldier; secondly, because he was poor; and thirdly, above all, because he had struck his wife. In consequence, he looked upon Wake altogether as a 'dreadful fellow.' Human nature is so oddly blended that Carew was a mass of contradictory qualities. He was highly educated and well read, and yet he was utterly unpractical in everyday life, and was no judge of either character or motive in others. He valued money, good repute, and success, for however advanced and unorthodox he might be in opinion, he had in practice a horror of acting in any way so as to bring himself into discredit with good society, whose approbation was to him as the breath of his nostrils. Therefore, with all his seeming liberality of thought, he quite agreed with Louisa in her idea of the main objects of life, which were to make money and to bow at the shrine of received opinion. Besides this, the most marked features in his character were those qualities which he shared in common with most of the human race—great selfishness, and a vast amount of conceit.

Carew, who now affected travelling in a palankeen, set off at once to the city, carried by four men, taking Miss Page's property with him. He soon arrived at Dilam Parshad's house in the jewellers' quarter, whose outward appearance of blank, windowless walls gave no indication of the Arabian-Nights-like splendour concealed within its humble-looking

exterior. A crowd of white-robed Asiatics thronged the narrow doorway which led into the abode, and Carew, pushing his way through them, found himself in a small court, surrounded by a pillared veranda. The celebrated Delhi jeweller, Dilam Parshad, was a stout man, whose head was swathed in a pink turban, of a shape and hue peculiar to his tribe, and probably of some pre-historic type. Several natives were in the court, and two Englishmen and a lady, who alone were seated on chairs. Some English customers, strangers to Carew, were being served, and—according to Asiatic manner—before them, laid out upon clean linen cloths on the floor of the court, were ranged small heaps of unset rubies, pearls, and other stones, and also innumerable gold chains, bracelets, and various articles of jewellery. All this untold wealth was kept with patriarchal simplicity in a common-looking black trunk.

The design and workmanship of Indian jewellery cannot be surpassed. Delhi has been for many centuries, and still is the centre of an enormous trade in gems and gold-work, because Indians continue to the present day their ancient custom of keeping wealth tied up in valuables, seldom investing their money in banks or public securities, as Europeans are in the habit of doing.

On seeing the portly figure of Carew, the bronzed face of the diamond-merchant expanded into a smile of welcome. The squire was a customer, having on one occasion purchased a valuable string of pearls from him, which he had bestowed upon Louisa. Carew, though an interpreter, explained his business, and the countenance of the tradesman fell, for, like most of his race, he preferred selling to buying or valuing. However, he courteously expressed a desire to see what the Sahib had brought. The ear-rings were first exhibited and passed from hand to hand, then the aigrette, and the jade sword hilt and boxes, and a murmur of surprise and admiration ran through the usually impassive Asiatic assembly, for the Indian thinks it ill-bred to express violent admiration for anything.

‘What do you think these ear-rings are worth?’ asked Carew.

‘Your slave could not buy such valuable things,’ answered the jeweller. ‘They are certainly worth many thousand pounds. The King of Delhi has become poor; but the

Begum Zennut Mahal, the King's young wife, might buy them if she saw them.'

'But, sir,' said an English gentleman, rising from his seat, 'excuse me for telling you these things exactly resemble some jewellery which has been stolen. May I ask how they came into your possession? Allow me first to present my card. I have come all the way from Calcutta especially to discover the perpetrator of one of the most singular and daring thefts upon record.'

Carew, turning red with anger, answered shortly:

'I consider, sir, your remarks intensely offensive, and decline to answer your question.'

'I regret giving you offence,' answered the other courteously, 'but I must tell you that a private in the 200th Regiment, of the name of Brown, or Wake, is suspected of having misappropriated some property answering exactly in description to these very articles you propose selling; and unless you can give a satisfactory account as to how you came by these things, I must put the matter into the hands of the proper authorities.'

Then Mr. Sims called a red-turbaned policeman, to whom the jewels were delivered.

Carew, never gifted with much presence of mind, was thunderstruck! The name of Wake, and the remembrance of all the property he had seen in his tent, so terrified him, that he offered no resistance on seeing Louisa's valuable jewels thus suddenly transferred from his possession to that of the police.

At last he tried to remonstrate, but he had no valid objection to offer; for the poor squire found himself facing many unpleasant possibilities.

'I believe I am speaking to Mr. Carew?' continued the lawyer.

Carew bowed assent.

'Well, sir, we cannot discuss this matter here. Most natives understand English, although they pretend they do not; and if you will accompany me, I will explain all the circumstances more fully to you.'

The astute Sims saw by the utter bewilderment of the squire, and the blank dismay written upon his face, that he was innocent in this affair; and he wished to discover how much Carew really knew.

The two Englishmen walked down the great Silver Street, which was thronged with turbaned men dressed in bright-coloured clothes, with here and there an occasional veiled woman. Strings of led camels, creaking bullock-carts, and bedizened and armed nobles of the King's court, with their followers mounted on prancing horses, completed the scene. But all this appeared to the luckless squire the phantasmagoria of a dream; all was unreal except the misery of fear and suspicion which he now experienced.

The lawyer went on: 'You are, perhaps, aware that Brown, now known as Wake, although a gentleman by birth, was lately a common soldier?'

'I have heard so.'

'When serving with the 200th at Meerut, he caused the death of a fakir, in a quarrel about a woman; and from this mendicant, or the woman in question, Wake undoubtedly gained the knowledge that a great treasure was hidden at Secro. He is supposed to have murdered this woman and some other accomplices with whom he shared the secret. Whether he did so or not has yet to be proved; but this matter of the fakir was very successfully hushed up by his friends at Meerut. I was professionally employed by the Newab of Doobghur, to whom the treasure belonged; I discovered from the gossip in the barrack-rooms of the 200th Regiment at Meerut that Private Brown had obtained a commission and was posted to a new regiment at Mooltan. I desired a confidential agent who was on the spot to report to me when Wake joined at that station; for I naturally disliked the expenditure of time and money in making so long a journey myself. The first news I heard from Mooltan was that Mr. Wake had resigned the service, and another officer would be sent to fill his place. I then concluded that Mr. Brown or Wake had left India, and so had escaped me, but afterwards I accidentally heard from an old woman that the gentleman I wanted was in camp near Delhi, with a party of officers on a shooting excursion. I hastened to the spot indicated, to find that he had gone no one knew where; but I can prove that while at Secro—a deserted, ruined place—Mr. Wake succeeded in unearthing an enormous treasure.'

'All this may be true,' answered Carew; 'but how do you know that these particular jewels were found at Secro? It seems utterly improbable.'

'Because,' said the lawyer, 'on the sword-hilt which you showed just now was the very name Ali Kareem, and the date 1727, which corresponds with the description given.'

'That may be a mere coincidence.'

'Moreover, all those jewels exactly correspond with an inventory of Ali Kareem's property which the Newab of Doobghur—the legal owner—has placed in my possession.'

'It looks suspicious, certainly,' assented Carew. 'But I suppose all native jewels are much alike; their fashions never change; they last centuries.'

'But, Mr. Carew, you have not told me how you obtained those things.'

'No; and I refuse to answer any question on the subject.'

'Ah well!' said the lawyer blandly, 'I shall have to prove (which I can) that you got them from Miss Page, who obtained them from Henry Wake, to whom she is engaged. You see, I am in possession of the main facts; but my employer does not wish to press the charge of theft, and if the whole, or at least the greater part, of the treasure is restored, no questions will be asked. But if not, the case will be fought out to the bitter end.'

'It does not concern me,' answered Carew; 'I know nothing about it.'

'But the property must have been concealed in Miss Page's house.'

'Not with my knowledge,' answered Carew.

'Where is Mr. Wake?' asked the lawyer.

'I do not know; and if I did, I should not feel myself justified in telling you, unless you can give me more certain proof of what you assert. It seems to me that you have accepted the statements of natives, who rarely if ever speak the truth, and who, like all Asiatics, have allowed their imaginations to become crazy about some fabulous wealth.'

'But the treasure *was* found, and has now disappeared. It has always been the national custom in India to hide wealth. To this day, if an average Hindoo has saved money, he either buys jewellery for his family, or buries his riches in the ground. The treasure in question was concealed under circumstances well known in history. Nadir Shah carried away gold, silver, and jewels to the value of eighty millions of our money, from Delhi, in 1727. No one doubts that fact; therefore, that a leading Moslem noble of

that day possessed a treasure worth half a million of money is not improbable, and still less that he caused it to be concealed when a ruthless invader was expected. In the taking of Delhi in 1727, a great part of the population were massacred in cold blood, and the houses of the nobility were burned. In this tumult, Ali Kareem and his whole family were murdered by the Persian soldiery.'

'I know,' answered Carew, 'everyone knows, that in the fifty miles of ruined cities round Delhi treasures had been constantly hidden; but the point at issue is—Did Mr. Wake find a treasure?'

'We know he carried it away.'

'Then why don't you claim it?'

'Because Mr. Wake has had such cunning and daring accomplices that it was no easy matter to find his hoards; but some of the things have been traced. Shrewd fellow that! He is engaged to be married to Miss Page, and there are a good many scandalous stories current about them. She is certainly mixed up in the affair, and we rather suspect Mr. Burke of the 200th, who, I fancy, knows more than he cares to tell. Captain Whitby—38th Regiment, N.I.—a relative of Wake, certainly helped him. The whole affair is very discreditable to the people concerned. Fancy the luck of that man Wake, in finding an enormous fortune without the least toil or effort! I have been slaving in this country for fifteen years, and have hardly gained a living. Luck is a wonderful thing in this world!'

Soon after, the two men went on their separate ways. Carew did not return to the Red House; he dared not go until this matter was cleared up, so he went back to his dāk bungalow exhausted mentally and physically, his brain in a very whirl of confusion. Again Louisa had deceived him! She told him she had inherited these jewels, and yet it seemed certain that she had received them from her husband, who had himself acquired them dishonestly. Again he recalled Louisa's midnight visit to Wake's tent, and the reason she had given him for her presence there. It seemed to him that the lawyer's accusations were too tangible to be denied.

Annoying as the whole matter was in every sense of the word, it was rendered doubly so from the fact that in all probability he would now be detained in India to give evidence in this wretched affair.

Moreover, Louisa's secret marriage to Wake would be published openly and form an important feature in what promised to be a *cause célèbre*. But he thought it better that Louisa should know at once what had occurred, so he sent her what he considered to be a very diplomatically-worded letter :

'DEAR MISS PAGE,

'A very unpleasant circumstance has arisen which I hope you will be able to explain. The jewels which have been so long heirlooms in your family have been mistaken for some articles lately purloined from a Newab, and an impertinent lawyer named Sims has officially seized the valuables, and made them over to the police. I deeply regret that this should have befallen your property while confided to my care. I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you this evening, as I dine with Desmond Burke at the Mess of the 105th Regiment.

'Yours very truly,

'REGINALD CAREW.'

Louisa turned very pale on reading the above. She felt that she had blundered in trying to sell those things in Delhi, Wake having warned her of the risks of so doing. However, it was useless to regret what she had done. She glanced again at Carew's letter—'So I am simply "Miss Page" now,' she thought! 'no longer his "fair queen."' It is the beginning of the end, and I have lost him. What shall I do?' And she wept bitterly.

Carew's admiration had become necessary to her life; the conviction that she was loved by a man whom she thought capable of the highest devotion had a great fascination for her, and she dreaded being forsaken by him. Now, it dawned upon her in its full horror—that she might not only lose Ali Kareem's jewels, but her new lover, and the fortune and social position he had offered her.

CHAPTER XXIV

AT BAY.

A BUGGY drove into the court of the Red House, and from it descended Mr. Sims, who, after inquiring for Miss Page, was ushered into the drawing-room, where he awaited her

arrival. Louisa was dressing for dinner, when a servant announced that a Sahib wished to speak with her, and on looking at the card he had sent in, she discovered that her visitor was no other than Lawyer Sims. For a moment her heart beat excitedly, because the information contained in Carew's letter prepared her for a most unpleasant interview. She knew that the only thing to be done was to see the lawyer and baffle him if possible ; so with an extraordinary lucidity of mind, and a calmness of nerve which seemed almost miraculous, she gracefully glided into the room, her countenance wearing a look of smiling inquiry.

'I hope, madam,' said the attorney, bowing low, 'that you will excuse my calling upon you. May I ask for a few minutes of your leisure?'

Louisa, with her unsurpassable power of acting, smiled sweetly in return, for even an attorney is a man, and can be vanquished by a woman. 'I am sure it is very kind of you to call upon me, and I am glad to make your acquaintance.'

'I have come on a matter of business, Miss Page.'

'Oh, indeed ; then I shall send for papa. I don't understand business.'

'I can quite believe, Miss Page, that with your youth and beauty you have followed more feminine accomplishments ; but will you just answer me a few questions about this little jade box?' and he put a gem-spangled casket into her hand. In the confusion which had attended the confiscation of the jewels in Dilam Parshad's shop, Mr. Sims had managed to retain this box, thinking he might obtain useful information through its means.

Louisa looked attentively at the glittering article. 'It is a curious box,' she said, 'but what about it?'

'Is it yours?'

'Mine? I wish it was ; I have never seen it before.'

'Really, Miss Page, you surprise me.'

'Why, Mr. Sims, how odd. What makes you think I have anything to do with the box?' Her rôle was childish innocence, and she looked at him smilingly with her puzzling gray eyes.

'There must be some mistake, Miss Page,' he said ; 'did you not give this box to Mr. Carew?'

'I? Of course not. I never give or take presents from gentlemen. Papa would not approve of it.'

'Oh, really,' said the lawyer, who felt persuaded that

Louisa was fibbing ; but she looked so charming, and fibbed so gracefully, that he almost felt as if he should like to believe her.

Louisa had long ago settled that the art of telling lies with coolness and cleverness was most important to learn betimes ; her code being that those who simply wanted truth were either inconveniently earnest or stupidly intense.

The lawyer went on. ' You know an officer of the name of Wake—Ensign Wake ?'

' Wake—I know so many officers—let me see. Can you tell me his regiment ? Possibly then I might remember.'

' He was in the Tipperary Rangers.'

' I have never met that regiment, Mr. Sims.'

' No ; but Mr. Wake was staying at Secro with you. Come, Miss Page, you cannot deny that.'

' Oh ! but that Mr. Wake is not in the army at all, so he said.'

' Did Mr. Wake give you any jewellery ?'

' Really, Mr. Sims, I told you before that I never accept presents from gentlemen.'

' But did you see any jewels in Mr. Wake's possession ?'

' I know nothing about Mr. Wake's private affairs ; and this being the case, I must ask you to talk to papa. That is the dinner-bell ringing. Good-evening, sir ;' and Louisa swept out of the room, and Sims, of course, could not follow her. Never had he cross-questioned a more artful witness. She was a playful *ingénue*, utterly obtuse, extraordinarily simple, and never tripped once.

He then saw the Major, but all his questions were met with Scriptural allusions, and prophecies, and the speedy founding of the new kingdom ; therefore Mr. Sims had no alternative but to take his departure, feeling that he had not gained much by his visit.

Louisa was greatly relieved when she saw the defeated lawyer drive away from the house, for, like most women, she had a perfect horror of the law. She could not help wondering what would happen next. If she had only left Delhi ! She was not a timid woman ; few men could ride better or more fearlessly, and it is probable that in a witness-box the most astute counsel would fail to confuse her, still less to make her blush ; yet—yet she hated being drawn into a legal quarrel.

How the dinner dragged ! She wondered why Wake had not kept his engagement to return. How would he take all this ? Would he drop her because she had disobeyed him about the jewels ? How anxious and nervous she felt !

As soon as she returned to her room she despatched a messenger to Carew, imploring him to come to her at once. She had long ago unpacked the hiding-place in the cellars, and put its contents into sea-chests, which she had despatched to England ; but, unfortunately, among the things that she had yet to put away there were heaps of compromising articles in addition to that unlucky handful of jewels.

Why did Wake tarry ? Had he been arrested ? If he would only come, she would leave Delhi with him while Carew and Burke were making merry at the Mess of the 105th N.I. It was very mean of Carew to abandon her in her difficulty, leaving her no alternative but to go with Wake. While she wandered about the veranda to catch a breath of air—for she could not sleep—the mysterious knockings and rappings went on as usual in this house of evil repute.

A vague rumour concerning her brother and some stolen jewels had reached Eleanor, and made her feel very ill at ease ; therefore her anxiety was not lessened when the deputy-magistrate Ogilvie (an old friend of Whitby's) called, and in a mysterious manner asked to see the Captain alone ; and, after a short interview in Whitby's study, left as hurriedly as he had come.

There was a look of expectation on Eleanor's handsome face as her husband re-entered the room where she was sitting. ' What did Mr. Ogilvie want ? ' she asked.

' Only,' he answered rather bitterly—' only to recommend that Louisa and Wake should both be spirited away from Delhi ! It is from no pity for Henry, rest assured, that he proposes this ; but he says, " It is too horrible that a charming, innocent girl like Louisa should be mixed up in a disgraceful trial, having been dragged into the affair by an unprincipled scamp." Eleanor,' continued Whitby sternly, ' if you have known all along that your brother had found some hidden treasure, it would have been better to have told me. It is want of confidence which I feel most.'

He spoke angrily, the first sharp words he had ever uttered to her.

‘I do not think my duty to you obliges me to reveal other people’s secrets,’ she answered with spirit.

‘Then he has found these immense riches?’

‘Can you keep a secret?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ he answered.

‘And so can I,’ retorted his wife.

‘That is an old catch,’ he said; ‘you do not mean to tell me?’

‘It is no affair of ours, and the less you know the better.’

‘Then you mean to screen Wake at all costs, even at my expense?’

‘Certainly I will do all I can to shield him, but not at your expense, Dick: you are dearer far to me than he is. But tell me, suppose Henry had found a treasure, was it right or wrong to take it? I fail to see any sin in it; my conscience may be obtuse. It seems to me that morally he has as much claim to this money as the people who naturally enough wish to get it for themselves. There are other things in my brother’s life that I would sooner see undone.’

‘The natives of India love litigation; they are sure to begin a lawsuit about this, and we shall be dragged into it. It is a disgraceful affair.’

‘Yes; but I hope you think my brother’s conduct not altogether unjustifiable. Of course I defend him; but if love cannot shelter a backslider, what else should or can?’

Eleanor was no meek Griselda, but a high-spirited, affectionate, and faithful woman.

Whitby confessed, in answer to his wife’s earnest inquiries, that he did not think Wake guilty of an enormous moral offence in hunting for the treasure, and taking it; but then there was, besides, the complication of the fakir’s murder, and the mysterious disappearance of other natives, of which also Wake was accused, and this made Whitby feel very much ashamed and deeply anxious.

‘They will require my evidence against Wake about the fakir,’ continued Whitby. ‘I told Ogilvie all I knew; what else can I do? But I knew nothing about the treasure.’

‘Then you did not try to screen my brother,’ she cried.

‘I will not lie for you, nor for anyone,’ he answered angrily.

‘You are quite right, dearest; but it is all very terrible.’

‘There will be an investigation, and Wake will be called

on to disgorge his ill-gotten gains if he has any. I cannot screen your brother now that he has committed robbery as well as murder.'

'The worst of all is that Henry intended coming back to Delhi to see Louisa to-night.'

'How unfortunate!' said Whitby; 'for the police have orders to watch the Red House, and have drawn a cordon round it.'

'Has it come to that?—how dreadful!' exclaimed his wife. 'I must send to tell him not to return here;' and she immediately despatched a servant to Budlee-ka-Serai with a letter to her brother.

Whitby was going to a Mess dinner, and left to dress, while Eleanor Whitby paced up and down her apartment in great agitation.

'If this business should make mischief between Richard and me, it will be worse than all. I would give worlds if the whole matter could be buried in oblivion for ever.'

Eleanor had a strong character, and an intelligence highly matured for her years; for she had learned through suffering, and it had aged her. Her life had hitherto been that most moving of all tragedies—a noble nature struggling with, though not utterly overcome by, adverse circumstances. She had all her past life been placed in uncongenial surroundings, and now by her happy marriage she had stepped from a path of daily martyrdom into the peace and rest of a seeming Paradise. She had discovered perfect truth, perfect loyalty, and perfect constancy in her husband—a long-dreamed-of ideal. The tears welled into her large dark eyes, and her short upper lip quivered with proudly repressed feeling, as she reflected bitterly that her brother had caused a passing estrangement between her and her husband.

Whitby was a plain, straightforward regimental officer; he was not ambitious, neither did he indulge in the conceit that he was born to set the world to rights. That part of his life which was not demanded by his regiment he had given up to scientific pursuits, and unostentatious philanthropy. It is true that he thought that meddling and muddling, if not worse, had decimated his regiment, the 38th N.I.; but he did not say so publicly, for plain speaking was considered a crime in those days, and he knew also that

for an obscure officer to protest against injustice was useless; still, he hated it with his whole heart, whether it affected him or the poorest, meanest wretch who walked the earth. The cause of humanity is promoted as much by a noble life as by platform speeches, agitation, or books. In India one such life as his was equal to the preaching of fifty missionaries, because the natives thought well of the Christian tenets when they remembered that 'Sahib,' who was so truthful, brave, courteous and unassuming. It was a succession of such men—unknown to fame—who had rendered the founding and still more the keeping of our Indian Empire possible.

While Eleanor was reflecting in agonizing misery that the person she loved most on earth was angry with her, Whitby, dressed in uniform, re-entered the room.

'Dearest,' he said, 'forgive my cross words; I know it has been no fault of yours,' and he kissed her white forehead in a sad, grave way; but the graceful sweetness of his apology, and his tender manner, filled her soul with peace and joy.

Whitby, Squire Carew, and his cousin Ensign Burke were dining together on the 10th May at the Mess of the 105th N.I., who were giving a farewell entertainment to one of the officers of that regiment. Captain Chadwick, the officer in question, was an especial favourite in the regiment, and much liked by all who knew him; so all the married officers deserted their domestic punkahs (we cannot say hearths) upon this occasion. Even the Colonel of the 105th, a man of portly figure, with a rubicund and well-bearded visage, came to speed the parting guest. The general aspect of the party was certainly brilliant. The long array of gaily-attired warriors included some bronzed veterans, somewhat too stout to appear altogether graceful in their short shell-jackets, while others were handsome, beardless boys, whom it seemed cruelty to send into the carnage of a battle-field. The glittering appointments of the table, the music of light laughter and flowing conversation, the recalling of old exploits in the field, and old convivialities in the mess-room, all combined to render the scene bright and amusing. It must be confessed, however, that the music of light laughter and flowing conversation mentioned above had a vinous gruffness about it; and when the dessert came, and the band struck up outside, and the decanters were circulating

freely, all hearts were opened. The ties of friendship about to be broken by this P.P.C. banquet then began to be considered in the light of the purest bonds of brotherhood. Every old officer in the regiment awoke to the miserable conviction that he could not be happy without his brother-officer Chadwick. The married officers to a husband would even have preferred to lose their wives. The Colonel and Chadwick had not spoken to one another when off duty for some time, but all was forgotten in the sentiment inspired by the bright potations each was quaffing. Tears trembled in the eyes of the Colonel as he rose, steadying himself on the shoulder of the senior Captain, who was seated on his left, 'to propose the health of his dear, he might say beloved friend—he might say his brother, Anthony Chadwick.' The Colonel was not a man of many words at the best of times, and he was now slightly incoherent in his remarks. However, he shook hands warmly with Chadwick, and wiped his own eyes pensively with his napkin. Then every other officer of the regiment also shook hands with Chadwick, and all wiped their several eyes with their napkins or pocket-handkerchiefs, or allowed their tears to glisten undisturbed. The band then was brought in to play 'Auld Lang Syne,' and the officers joined hands, crossing their arms over the table, some standing on their chairs with one foot on the table, all shouting the old song at the top of their voices, and altogether there was a mixture of wild revelry and vinous pathos in the scene which was very charming. The departing warrior broke down with emotion when he returned thanks for the ovation he had received. He had little thought before how dear his brother-officers were to him, or he to them, and as he stood before them on unsteady feet he could only stammer out, 'This is the proudest moment of my life, over and over again.'

Then the party broke up, and Burke accepted the offer of a seat in the dog-cart of a young civilian who had offered to drive him to Whitby's house, situated about a quarter of a mile away from the Mess. Before they had proceeded far, the horse shied, and backed the cart into a ditch under a wall topped with broken bottles, and Burke, thinking the vehicle likely to upset, clambered from the back seat on to a buttress of the wall, whereon, fortunately, there was no demolished glass. Being discovered in that position by

Willoughby and Carew, who were returning home on foot, he was immoderately chaffed for being intoxicated, although he insisted that he evinced his sobriety by deserting an unsafe dog-cart for a secure wall. Thus accidentally are reputations for good or ill made in this scandal-loving world!

No idea of an unfriendly future disturbed the Ensign when he awoke the next morning with rather a headache, thinking only what awful fun the Mess dinner had been.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RISING OF THE STORM.

BURKE, Whitby, and his wife were sitting at their breakfast-table at eight o'clock on the morning of the 11th of May, 1857. Whitby was dressed in full uniform, having only just returned from morning parade. The table was decorated with flowers, and the room, in spite of the glare and heat without, was dim and cool, the shutters being closed.

The bungalow was a scene of repose and happiness, 'a home where hearts were of each other sure.' The newly-married couple and their friend were lingering over the meal, and laughing at those nameless little trifles and verbal jokes which lose all their point in repetition, and yet raise a gay laugh in daily life; while Florence had started early, when it was cool, to spend the day in the city of Delhi, with some friends of the name of Palmer, who lived there.

Suddenly Whitby's orderly, a handsome young Rajpoot, rushed into the apartment, the picture of fear and amazement. 'Sahib,' he cried, 'the Fouj has come from Meerut!'

Whitby rose from the table, fastened on his sword, and put his hat on his head. Despite his endeavours to appear calm, so as not to alarm his wife, he looked almost as much astonished as his informant.

'What is the Fouj? what has happened?' cried Eleanor and Burke.

'Oh, nothing,' answered her husband quite collectedly. 'It means only the army. There is nothing to be frightened about. I am going to see the Brigadier, and I shall be back directly.'

He then left, accompanied by his orderly; and his wife,

not at all disturbed in mind, went about her daily duties as calmly as at any other time ; while Burke lit a cigar and read a novel.

Whitby soon returned, looking rather annoyed, but otherwise as calm and self-possessed as usual. He said :

‘ Brigadier Graves has ordered me to take two hundred men to the White House. Some slight disturbances have taken place at Meerut, and from that point we should command a view of the road from the ford of Baghput, by which the disaffected may try to reach the city of Delhi.’

‘ But the heat is frightful,’ she said ; ‘ must you go now ?’

‘ Yes,’ he answered, ‘ but I shall get under cover at the White House, which is empty. Good-bye, sweetheart.’ He kissed his wife as he bade her adieu. Neither of them for one moment imagined what frightful scenes they would pass through before they met again. For the mutiny of the Sepoy army had suddenly taken place. The Whitbys had little expected it, nor could they foresee the six months of ceaseless struggle and conflict which would occur before the revolt was suppressed.

Whitby walked to the quarters of his soldiers, where he was joined by Captain Tytler, another officer of the same regiment, but neither of them suspected the loyalty of their men. The soldiers proceeded to fill their pouches with ammunition, and Whitby could not help observing that they were taking a larger quantity than he had ordered ; but, as time was short, he contented himself with reprimanding them sharply for the present, determining to report some of them for disorderly conduct. At length the two companies started and marched down the straight road of the cantonments, on each side of which stood the detached villa-like residences of the English officers, surrounded by gardens full of trees and shrubs.

As they marched on, they saw an English officer riding rapidly towards them.

‘ Whitby,’ he said, ‘ the Brigadier has ordered all the women and children to assemble at the artillery-sergeants’ quarters. I will inform your wife, and I will let Miss Page and her father know.’

The staff officer galloped on. His words pierced Whitby’s heart like a dagger, for he realized that some great danger was now apprehended, or the Brigadier would not have

ordered such precautionary measures ; and although he was bent on performing the military duty on which he was ordered, he could not help feeling deeply anxious about his young wife, who, unsuspecting of any danger, was left alone under such unforeseen circumstances. They passed a high massively built small fortress, called the Flagstaff Tower ; it was situated on the hill known as the Ridge of Delhi, and from its summit the English ensign still waved. After leaving this, they marched but a short distance, and halted at a large unoccupied villa, the White House. By this time the heat was intense, for it was now eleven o'clock, and the two officers hailed with pleasure the sight of the mansion, where they hoped at least to find a shelter from the burning rays of the sun.

Whitby addressed his soldiers :

'Come out of the heat,' he said, 'and sit here in the shade.'

'We prefer sitting here, Sahib,' said some of the younger men with un-military familiarity.

Whitby remarked a group of young soldiers most of them mere boys, who were listening with intense interest to a veteran, who seemed to be haranguing them. He heard the orator say : 'It is just one hundred years since Plassey. Have not the Brahmins always foretold it ? Is it not written in the books that the Company shall rule one hundred years and no more ? Are not the men from Meerut our brothers ? Why should we then fight against them and obey foreigners ?'

Whitby could not help feeling disturbed at this speech, although at the time he little understood its ominous import.

'Come in out of the sun,' he said sternly to the speaker. 'You—an old soldier—what do you mean by this disobedience ? It will be all the worse for you, who ought to know better.'

The soldiers submissively entered the door of a large shed, for the habit of military obedience was still strong in them, added to which the more than ordinary influence Whitby exercised over the men of his own regiment forced them to submit. Yet still there was an atmosphere of restlessness and excitement around them too real to be completely hidden from observation. They talked, they gesticulated, some argued, and, again, some spoke in low earnest whispers,

They had been at the White House five hours, when suddenly an end was put to the tension of nerves so painfully felt by the men and their officers.

It was then four o'clock in the afternoon, and all at once every man jumped to his feet, and seized his gun, startled by a terrific noise, which sounded like the roar of a thousand cannon, or even as if the end of the world had come.

Natives and Europeans alike gazed in amazement at the city lying below them across the river Jumna, for the terrifying sound evidently proceeded thence. Then they saw a snowy white cloud—like a sheet—hanging over Delhi. This gradually rose higher and higher, becoming quite black as it ascended into the cloudless sky.

'Good God!' said Whitby to Tytler; 'it is all up with us. The natives have taken Delhi, and blown up the magazine!'

The effect of this spectacle upon the two hundred soldiers was electrical. After gazing on the sight in deathlike silence for a moment as if spellbound, they rent the air with acclamations, and, being Hindoos and mostly men of Oude, they shouted 'Long may Pirtheeraj reign!'

They then, without the least hesitation, rushed tumultuously on the road to Delhi, taking their arms with them. Whitby and Tytler called after them, exhorting and commanding them to return, but their words fell upon deaf ears. The thoughtless youths of the 38th, who had but lately joined, hastened on to swell the throng in the revolted city; but forty old soldiers, whom time and dangers shared together had bound personally to their officers, remained behind.

'My friends,' said Whitby, addressing them, 'you will be loyal to the English Government and true to me?'

'Sahib,' they answered, 'we will not allow a hair of your head to be touched!'

Whitby was about to return to cantonments with his small guard of faithful soldiers, to report to the Brigadier that most of his men had deserted, when he saw Captain Holland riding in hot haste towards them.

'Whitby,' he said as he drew near, 'the Brigadier has ordered you to bring your men at once to the Flagstaff Tower.'

'My men!' answered Whitby bitterly. 'I have only these forty soldiers left. The rest have gone to join the insurrection in Delhi.'

‘Come at once, Whitby,’ answered the other. ‘The Brigadier wishes to see you.’

They soon reached the Flagstaff Tower, which they found greatly changed from the quiet and tranquil appearance which they observed as they had passed it in the morning. The English ensign still waved from the tower, and some Indian boys, who, being Christians, had thrown in their lot with the English, manned the top of the small fortification, and muskets and ammunition were being handed up to them. On one side stood the Brigadier, holding an impromptu council of war with half a dozen officers as to the best means to be employed in the emergency in which they found themselves. On the level ground which surrounded the tower were several groups of English ladies, ayahs, and children. A great number of private carriages stood near at hand; there were besides a few sepoys and numerous native servants, while the interior of the fort was also crowded with women and children.

Whitby looked around with agonizing anxiety, and at last saw his wife, whose fine face looked calm and brave; she was standing at the foot of the tower, handing up arms to its boy defenders.

Another feature of the scene was a cart, whose ghastly contents were hidden by a covering of pink and yellow muslin, which shrouded the dead bodies of some of the officers of the 54th and other regiments, who had been murdered by their soldiers that morning in the city. Among them was the corpse of poor Chadwick, and many others who had been at the dinner-party of the previous night. Before Whitby could speak to his wife, he, in a few hasty words, reported the desertion of his men to the Brigadier; and was then, for the first time, made acquainted with what had actually taken place at Delhi.

The native cavalry and other regiments had risen the night before in Meerut, murdered their officers, and had ridden forty miles straight over to Delhi. Brigadier Graves sent out the 54th N.I. to oppose their entrance into the city, but instead of repulsing the rebels, their regiment fraternized with them, and killed their English officers, who strove to keep them to their duty. The revolted troops had been joined by the King of Delhi, and, at his orders, they then rushed pell-mell to the Arsenal, which they knew was

filled with munitions of war. Young Willoughby had charge of this post, and as he had but nine Englishmen to rely upon, he could not hope to defend the place against the swarms who attacked it. He laid a train of gunpowder to the magazine, and, as the rebels poured in, he applied a match to it and blew up assailants and defenders together, being prepared to sacrifice himself, and those he knew were loyal, rather than allow this great store of warlike materials to fall into the hands of the insurgents.

Willoughby, so handsome, brave, and gentle, so modest and unassuming, had in his breast the heart of a true hero, and had performed a deed the remembrance of which will last for ever, and rank worthily with the most vaunted achievements of ancient chivalry. Strange to relate, Willoughby and another officer escaped from the burning ruins, and made their way out of the city, but only to be murdered at last by hostile villagers.

Indecision and hesitation were rampant in the little council held at the Flagstaff Tower; no one knew what to do for the best; some advised one thing, and some another. This was a worthy hesitation, for Brigadier Graves refused to abandon his post; he believed and hoped every minute to see English troops and guns arrive from Meerut, only forty miles away. At Meerut there was a large force of British horse, foot, and artillery.

Tytler, of the 38th N.I., addressing the Brigadier, said:

‘Pardon me, sir, but what are you going to do?’

‘I shall stay here,’ he answered, ‘and protect the women and children.’

‘But,’ resumed Tytler, ‘it is impossible to defend them here without food or water.’

‘We cannot abandon our post,’ said some of the other officers.

‘There is no disgrace in leaving a situation which is untenable,’ said Tytler, ‘and this is so; and I dare not stay here and see my wife and children murdered before my eyes. It would be unmanly in me not to try and save them and the other ladies and children, and the only way to do so is to leave at once. I will stand my court-martial,’ he said hotly; ‘but leave this we must, and that immediately!’

The times were out of joint, indeed, or Tytler would never have addressed his superior officer in these terms, but have contented himself with the strict performance of any duties assigned to him ; but he felt it was incumbent upon him to speak out. He was a good officer, having a greater knowledge of the native character than most Englishmen possessed, and this enabled him to see clearly the desperate nature of the strait they were in. Tytler's words accustomed men's minds to the idea of retreat, but they could hardly believe that succour would not come from Meerut, and they detested the idea of retiring.

By this time it was five o'clock, and the heat was oppressive, and besides, they had been almost without food or drink the whole of the anxious day. So it was decided that when the sun set they should retreat, and try to reach Umballa, which was about seventy miles distant, and which was garrisoned by English troops. They possessed two guns, which it was arranged should form the advance guard, while the forty faithful sepoy who had remained with Whitby, and a few others of the 74th, were to protect the rear. This being settled, Whitby, having now a line of action open to him, went to his wife, who had been watching and listening to the tones of his loved voice, when he had also given it as his opinion that they must retire.

'How thankful I am to see you here!' he cried. 'How did you come? have you a carriage?'

'No,' she answered; 'I was brought here by the quartermaster's wife.'

'I will send for our close carriage at once,' he answered, 'for when the sun sets we are all to start. But where,' he continued in a tone of anxiety, 'is poor little Florence?'

'She has not come yet. She was in the city, you know, but as soon as the disturbance began Desmond Burke rushed off to Delhi to bring her away.'

Whitby dared not put into words the terrible truth, which was that nearly all the English in the city—men and women—were in the greatest danger.

Just then an extraordinary apparition appeared ; a fair, tall, well-formed man, whose feet were bare; he had no hat on his head, and his costume was a loose suit of much-soiled white flannel, looking more than ever peculiar where all the men were in full uniform.

‘It is Carew!’ cried Whitby.

The squire addressed the Brigadier: ‘I have just managed to escape from the Main-guard. The whole city is up, and has joined the mutineers; they kill all the English—men, women, or children—they see.’

And then in a few hurried words he went on to explain that he and several English men and women at the Main-guard had managed to drop from the city wall, a distance of thirty feet, and cross the glacis of the fort. ‘Most of our party,’ he said, ‘were determined to get into the open country and reach Meerut. Burke and Florence are together; but I joined an officer called Merton, and came here. Where are Major and Miss Page? I do not see them,’ he said, addressing the Whitbys.

‘I have not seen them all day,’ said Eleanor. ‘They were certainly warned, at the same time that I was, to come to the Flagstaff, but, for some reason or other, Louisa absolutely refused to leave her house; at least, I was told so.’

‘I will go to the Red House at once,’ cried Carew, although he was utterly exhausted by his dangerous escape from the walled city and long walk in the sun. ‘What can have become of her?’ He left, running with great speed towards the Red House.

Whitby’s few soldiers were standing near him, and an old man now addressed him:

‘Sahib,’ he said, ‘are you playing with us? If you do not leave at once, we cannot go with you. For God’s sake leave at once! The cavalry from Meerut are in the Ochterlony gardens, close at hand, resting their horses; they are only waiting till the sun goes down, for they think, as you have stayed here all day, that you intend remaining for the night; and unless you are gone when they arrive you will all be murdered, and they will kill us for having stayed with you. Leave at once, Sahib, or we must go.’

Whitby repeated this fresh news to the Brigadier, who then gave orders for instant departure. The ladies and children were placed in vehicles, and of the officers some walked and some rode. Whitby’s carriage having opportunely arrived, he placed his wife in it, and mounted his charger, which his orderly had brought up.

‘I have to stay with my men,’ he said, ‘but you will

drive on, and mind you follow the guns, then reach the ford of Baghput, and go across country to Meerut.'

The procession started at full gallop, the guns going first, as ordered; but Captain De Teissier, the artillery officer who was in command of them, having had his charger shot under him early in the day, was on foot, and was soon left behind.

They had proceeded along some roads when Eleanor discovered that her carriage was no longer following the course of the guns.

'Stop,' she said to the coachman; 'you are going wrong! Why do you not follow the guns?'

'Because they have left us,' answered the servant. 'They are gone to Delhi to join the rebels, and I am driving to Baghput as the Sahib said.'

'Then we will wait for him,' said Eleanor. 'I will not go on alone, for he told me to follow the guns.'

They stopped for a few minutes, and then Whitby rode up excitedly to the carriage.

'Where are the guns?' he asked.

'They have deserted us and gone over to the enemy,' answered Eleanor.

'And my forty men, who promised me to be faithful, have left us also! We met, as we came along, two of our own men who were frightful-looking objects, being literally flayed alive! They were part of the guard at the Arsenal at Delhi, and had been blown up with it. Not knowing whence they had come, I inquired how they were in so dreadful a condition? They answered, "Willoughby Sahib has blown us up when we were doing our duty to the English Government." "Then," said my men, "if the English treat us like this we will serve them no longer." I tried to reason with them,' he continued; 'I reminded them of their promise, but it was useless. "Sahib," they said, "you told us we should have guns, and they are gone; you promised us water, we have none. Go and take the ladies and children away, for you are in danger. We will allow no English to be killed if we can help it, for your sake, but we can stay with you no longer." So they have gone, all but three men, who declare they will stay to protect our individual party, and one of them is my orderly, Partel Singh.'

The carriage, in following the guns, had gone down various roads, and the Whitbys found themselves in the neighbourhood of their own house.

That evening, before the Brigadier (who was one of the last to leave the cantonments) finally deserted his post, the ammunition which had been collected at the Flagstaff Tower was drenched with water and rendered useless. An effort was made to recover a magazine outside the city walls, held by the 38th N.I., but without success. Incendiary fires were rising on all sides of the cantonments before Brigadier Graves, Captain Nichol, and Dr. Stewart mounted their horses and turned their backs upon the city of the Great Mogul.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MAGNANIMOUS DEEDS.

It was now nearly sunset, the English community had spent the whole day at the Flagstaff Tower, and no help had come from Meerut.

‘Sahib,’ said the youth Partel Singh, coming up to Whitby, ‘you do not realize the danger. Every minute is precious; let us start. See,’ he continued, pointing to the road which led to the city below them, ‘look at that distant crowd coming from Delhi, the sun glittering on their spears and swords. They are Goojurs, and with them are some rebel soldiers and bad characters of the city. It is not only the revolted troops you have to fear, although they are killing all the English without regard to age or sex; but those robbers are even more to be dreaded!’

Whitby saw the advancing horde and recognised the immediate peril in which they were placed, for the approaching mob cut off the road to Meerut; therefore, he directed the coachman to drive rapidly in the opposite direction down the Kurnaul road. They would soon have reached a place of comparative safety, but just at this moment Carew arrived, breathless with running.

‘Thank Heaven! you have not yet started,’ he gasped out. ‘Major Page’s coachman has gone off to Delhi, taking the horse and buggy with him. The riding horses have also disappeared, and unless you take pity upon Louisa and her

father they will be murdered. For God's sake, wait a few minutes for them.'

Whitby turned to his wife: 'We cannot leave them to a horrible fate,' he said; 'still we have no time to lose; we are all in deadly peril. Shall we attempt their rescue, Eleanor? The Red House is not very far behind us. I know it is a dangerous undertaking, but I leave it to you to decide. Shall we return?'

His wife covered her face with her hands for one instant; then, looking up, said calmly, although her lips trembled: 'I am afraid for you—not for myself, dear; but let us do our duty, and save them.'

The equipage was turned back, and that part of the road being now utterly deserted, they reached the Red House without further adventure. A flight of steps led up to the door, and there they saw Louisa standing in the veranda.

As the carriage drew up, she said: 'I hardly dared to hope you would come back. How noble of you! how like you! The servants have all deserted us, and my father is not himself. No entreaties of mine or Carew's will sober him. Richard, you must carry him to your carriage. Have you room for any luggage?'

'Certainly not,' answered Whitby angrily.

She was disappointed, the luggage she spoke of being some of the treasure, to retain which she had perilled her life by refusing to leave the house that morning.

'Richard, do come and speak to my father,' she said; 'please do.'

'I will come back soon, darling. God preserve you!' Whitby said, as a last adieu to his wife.

'Partel Singh,' he added to his orderly, as he dismounted, 'take care of the Mem Sahib until I come back.'

Then Whitby, accompanied by the other two Sepoys who had remained with him, ran up the stone steps and entered the house.

Some minutes passed, and Whitby had not returned. It was a dreadful time of suspense to Eleanor after her husband had left her, going she knew not to what fate; perhaps even to his doom. An ominous feeling of dread came over her. Alas! poor soul, she might well fear, if all the future, with its unspeakable horrors, had been opened to her; but such a future had never entered into any Englishwoman's

wildest dreams. She had a presentiment that she might never see her husband again; and yet, being brave and generous by nature, she could not reconcile it to herself to abandon a fellow-creature when the chance of rescue seemed so feasible. He must return soon from that fatal house, whose dilapidated appearance and forsaken air haunted her long after in her dreams.

The time she had waited seemed interminably long, although in reality it was but a few moments, and then all at once Eleanor and her servants gazed at each other with awe-struck faces. What was that awful yell—that hoarse murmur of many voices, as if the very gates of hell were opened?

The orderly ran a few paces out of the gate, and then returned, looking utterly terrified.

‘The rebels have come!’ he exclaimed. ‘They have vowed to kill all the English—man, woman, or child! Even to have served the English is certain death.’

On hearing this, the terror-stricken groom fled; and the coachman, detaching the horse from the carriage, mounted it and road away. Eleanor’s first impulse was to rush into Major Page’s house for safety.

‘No, no; not in that house, Mem Sahib,’ Partel Singh said. ‘They will search it for the treasures hidden there, and you will be killed. Your Sahib is in the stable, quite close; I will take you to him; follow me.’

Eleanor Whitby hesitated. It was a time for immediate action; but she did not know where to fly, or whom to trust, when all around were enemies. Again, on the wind, came the sonorous din of many voices, but now mingled with the popping of fire-arms. The noise was so near that it was certain the rabble were approaching the spot where she stood. Up to this time her enemies were not in sight; they were hidden by the boundary-wall and trees of the villa, added to which the winding of the paths concealed them from her view, and also prevented them from seeing that one of the accursed English race was there in their power.

‘Quick! quick!’ cried the Rajpoot. ‘Ah! the stables are too far away; there is not time enough to reach them. Hide at once here, in this place.’

A small ruined mosque was quite near at hand, and

through the doorway of this deserted building Mrs. Whitby and Partel Singh had barely time to disappear before the mob surged in like an angry sea. Eleanor and her attendant found themselves in a large vaulted chamber, which was very imperfectly lighted; but perceiving a narrow circular stone staircase leading up to the minaret, they mounted it. From a loop-hole in the thick wall of this little tower, Eleanor could see all that passed without being herself observed.

‘I,’ said the youth, ‘will stand with my sword and guard this stair.’

The scene which met her horror-struck eyes resembled hell itself let loose! A sea of human beings surrounded the Red House as far as the eye could behold. The mob consisted of soldiers in scarlet coats—the uniform which had hitherto been the badge of a friend, but which they now dishonoured—and Goojurs, a robber tribe, with the ‘scum of the bazaars,’ the outlaws and evil-doers who, in every country, join a riot. Many of this rabble were intoxicated—some with drink, all by evil passions. Some of them carried flaming torches, while others bore either fire-arms, swords, or spears. Nothing more Satanic could be imagined than the aspect of this mass of vile recreants, with their rolling eyes and long tangled hair, their faces disfigured by habitual crime and atrocities, and now distorted by frenzied madness. The air was rent by their shrill cries, which were discordant enough to wake the very dead.

With frantic yells the excited multitude attacked the house and surged up the flight of steps leading into the hall. Then Eleanor heard a more than ever fierce cry from the raging mob. Major Page was standing at the door with a drawn sword in his hand. He was either making his way through the dense crowd, or trying to calm them by speaking to them. Then there was the ringing sound of a musket-shot, and she saw the poor old man fall on the door-step. The dial olic crowd hurrahed and shrieked with savage fury at the first blood spilled, and with trumpet-tongued cries they joyfully exulted, screaming: ‘The old Sahib is dead!’ ‘The Sahib is killed!’ ‘The treasure! The treasure!’ This outrage made Eleanor’s heart beat violently; she trembled for the fate of her husband, for Louisa and Carew, should they be discovered in that accursed house,

The crowd swayed from side to side, and then she perceived an opening in the centre of it, whence, much to her surprise, there emerged Louisa and Carew, both mounted. They were urging their horses through the mob, who vainly tried to stop them. The people were getting more and more excited, and were pricking the animals with lances and spears. It would have been impossible for the riders to have escaped by the gate, for their passage was barred by a dense mob of yelling demons; but Louisa, putting her horse at the garden wall, which was not more than the height of a five-barred gate, cleared it; her companion followed her example, and they gained the high-road, sweeping past Eleanor's hiding-place at a gallop, in a perfect hail-storm of bullets, which apparently did not touch them.

It was a terrible moment to Eleanor to see them ride away, and to know that she was left alone amongst that horde of infuriated savages. Where was her husband? Could it be possible that Louisa and her companion had had the incredible selfishness to ride away and leave him to the mercy of those fiends? She had time to notice that Louisa was riding her husband's gray charger, Talisman. A chill dread came over her. She feared now that her loved one must be dead, or how could Louisa have become possessed of his horse? In the agony of the moment she turned to implore the trusty orderly to try to discover the fate of his master, but, to her horror, she found she was alone! Partel Singh had abandoned her and fled!

The place in which Eleanor had taken refuge was a room about twelve feet square, the walls of which were exceedingly thick, and of antique workmanship. It was very dark, being lighted only by the one small aperture in the stair whence she had surveyed the mob at the Red House. She again placed her pale sad face close to the opening. High above the moving, unquiet, turbaned crowd was the placid evening sky, in which one star was shining. There was an exquisitely calm and cloudless sunset, of orange and gold. Eleanor wondered if it was the last she should behold on earth! That very morning she had thought her life lay stretched out before her in a ceaseless age of happiness; and now the end had come, so early, so unexpectedly. However, neither futurity nor eternity pressed on her soul; it was the memory of her earthly love which filled her every thought.

She felt she could not die until she had seen her husband's face again!

But her sad reflections were dispelled by the sight of huge sheets of flame, which leaped into the sky, crimsoning the whole heaven. With tears in her eyes she recognised that the bungalow, the home where she had been so happy, was now a prey to devouring flames. By this time the houses in the cantonment, which were mostly thatched with straw, had been set on fire, and blazed up one after the other.

The mob tried to burn down the Red House, but, being built entirely of red granite, it resisted their efforts, although they pulled off the doors and even dragged out the window-frames. A large bonfire was lighted on the lawn, and in it was thrown all sorts of property once much prized and valued, consisting of the hapless Major's ponderous folios of theology, broken furniture, and the feminine nicknacks with which Louisa had decorated the place. Wild figures, thin and haggard, some with clanking fetters, having but lately escaped from gaol, danced round the fire, which resembled a funeral pyre. The short twilight was over, the night was black and obscure, and the light of the fire showed the moving figures of the rioters plainly. The glare also disclosed plunderers who were carrying away everything they considered of value.

But what particularly astonished Eleanor was to see a very small woman flitting about, whom she soon recognised as the Witch of Megara. She appeared to be ordering and directing some muscular peasants and red-turbaned police to carry away numerous large and heavy trunks. Eleanor did not know then, although she afterwards suspected, that this was part of the disputed wealth of Ali Kareem. To gain this, the Red House was one of the first attacked in the rising, and the mob had been led there by this malevolent old crone.

As Eleanor gazed upon the fire with a sort of fascination she felt a light touch upon her arm, and started in terror. A low voice near her said: 'Have no fear, Mem Sahib. Means for your escape are arranged; put on this white chuddar, which will hide you, and follow me.'

By the gleams of the bonfire which fell upon his handsome young face, but even more by his words, Eleanor recognised the faithful orderly.

'Where is my husband?' she asked, her lips almost re-

fusing to move, so greatly did she dread what the answer might be.

‘Some of our men protected the Sahib from the Goojurs; he lives, and is in a place of safety, and has sent for you.’

Whitby’s wife hardly knew if she could believe this; she dreaded that the soldier was concealing the truth from her. ‘He is dead!’ she cried in an agony of terror.

‘No, no!’ answered the Hindoo; ‘the words of your slave are true. He is safe, and it is the will of God that you shall be soon together again. But let us go. Your Excellency must go back to the ashes of your homestead, where you will find means to take you from this place; I will conduct you thither.’

‘But I could not pass those dreadful wretches,’ said Eleanor, terrified. ‘They would murder me, and I may as well die here.’

‘I can take your Excellency safely. The night is dark, you will not be seen; besides, they are much too busy plundering to trouble themselves about you. Your ayah is in the stables; she is waiting for you.’

Eleanor was trembling like an aspen leaf; the scenes through which she had passed had completely unstrung her nerves. She dreaded leaving the sheltering walls of the little mosque, but she reasoned that she must leave the place sooner or later, for food and water, and when daylight came she could not fail to be discovered by the rebels.

She followed the soldier out of the mosque by a door in the rear of the building, and they found themselves among the monuments in the deserted Mahomedan burial-ground. Under cover of the darkness of the night, and by an unfrequented path, she reached the grounds of what had once been her home, now only a heap of blackened walls and smouldering embers.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PERILOUS JOURNEY.

ELEANOR WHITBY reached her house to find that only its four bare walls were standing, for the thatched roof had been fired and had fallen in, while all the contents of her bungalow had been either burned or carried away by

pillagers. After glancing in a confused and dazed manner at the sudden desolation which had fallen on her dwelling, she, shielded by the friendly darkness, followed Partel Singh through the wrecked garden and over the trampled-down flower-beds. They made their way to the stables, only to discover that they also were destroyed, and that servants, horses, and carriages were gone; however, Eleanor perceived that a rough hovel was still standing uninjured, the door of which was closed.

Though complete silence reigned inside, smoke was issuing between the cracks of the plank-entrance, and the gleams of light which made their way through the crevices showed that the place was inhabited. It was the only sign of life in that ruin-strewn spot; all else around was dark, save where the smouldering ashes of the wrecked habitation here and there emitted a feeble glow.

They stood alone in the darkness. What to do they hardly knew, but Eleanor had been informed that her husband was to be found among the ruins of their late home, and this nerved her heart; therefore they determined to apply for help to the occupants of the hovel.

'Open!—open!' cried Partel Singh, knocking at the door. At first there was no answer to the summons, but at length the entrance was very cautiously unbarred, and they entered, to find several of the Whitbys' servants, including Eleanor's Portuguese ayah. How strangely mistress and maid looked at each other for one moment! Since they had last met they had stared death in the face.

When Eleanor's eyes had become accustomed to the smoke which filled the little cabin, she perceived that there was a fire in the centre of the mud floor, the smoke from which escaped as best it might, as there was no chimney for its exit. Close to the fire were seated a few of her household, looking paralyzed with fear, but in spite of her agonized scrutiny no trace could she find of her husband.

'Where is the master?' she cried in terror.

'The Lord only knows,' answered a bearded man, who was absolutely shaking with fear; 'but if any English are found here we shall all be killed. We have served them for our daily bread, not to get our lives taken from us. Go from here, you Feringhi!'

'If some one will get me a conveyance, I will leave at once,' said Eleanor.

'That is impossible, for the coachman and grooms have taken the carriages and horses off,' answered the man.

'You must walk to Kurnaul,' said another, in an insulting tone. 'You are not the first of the human race who will have performed a four days' march.'

At this moment a party of noisy marauders, consisting of several wild-looking peasants, rushed into the hut.

'Give me your jewels,' cried a strong, broadly-built youth, 'or I shall take them.'

The stranger approached Eleanor in a threatening manner, while his demand was greeted by the circle round the fire with a roar of approving laughter.

Eleanor took off her brooch, ear-rings, watch and chain, and handed them to her assailant.

'And those rings,' he cried.

She gave them to him also, reserving only her wedding-ring.

'I will have that ring as well!' he shouted.

'I will not give it,' she answered proudly.

'I must have it.'

'You shall not.'

The man approached with the intention of using brute force.

'What are you doing?' she heard a shrill voice say from the doorway. 'Leave the lady alone. Men are begging for their lives, and she, a woman, does not fear.'

The Witch of Megara entered the hut. Eleanor was astonished at the transformation in her appearance; hitherto she had seemed a feeble old woman, now she had become active and sprightly.

'Son of a burnt father!' she continued, addressing the robber. 'You, a Rajpoot! and war with a helpless woman! Are none of the Faithful here? Abdool Kader, will you take this Englishwoman to rejoin the Captain Sahib?'

An old, white-bearded Moslem, clothed in snowy muslin, rose from the ground, where he had been seated. He was the under-butler; he said to the old woman (with folded hands and inclined head—the Asiatic posture of deference), 'I will take her Excellency away in a covered cart.'

'No one will be able to see you,' said the witch, 'and should any of the contumacious inquire who Abdool Kader has with him, he must reply, "My wife and family are in

the cart," and then no one will be minded to injure you. Delays are dangerous,' she continued; 'your Excellency should leave at once.'

'Tell me,' cried Eleanor in an accent of despair, 'is my husband safe? I had hoped to find him here.'

'Ah!' answered the woman, 'did I not warn you both? You thought the old woman mad; but all she foretold has come true! Yes, yes, the Sahib is safe for the present; have I not preserved him? The Sahib is in hiding; hasten, therefore. Who can tell how soon he might be discovered and murdered? Are not all thirsting for the blood of the infidel? Your conveyance waits. Go, lady! hasten away before evil befalls you.'

At the open door Eleanor saw the vehicle which was to bear her away to her husband, and, as she hoped, to a place of safety. It was a 'hackary,' a rude conveyance of roughly-hewn wood, without springs, over-arched by a covering of yellow matting, and drawn by white bullocks.

She turned to the Witch of Megara:

'Is it true that my husband is well?' she asked.

'Listen to the words of a woman's heart,' said the old woman. 'Men are trembling with fear, and she thinks not of herself—only of her beloved. Go! do not fear, lady. Your destiny is propitious; you will see him again; he is well. Go! Abdool Kader knows the road to take.'

Straw had been laid in the cart for its occupants to lie or sit upon, and Eleanor and her ayah entered the primitive conveyance; for the life of the latter was in equal danger with that of her mistress, as she, too, was a Christian, and in that fierce outburst of Asiatic fanaticism her creed alone was sufficient to sign her death-warrant. A wild-looking, half-clad lad, seated on the shafts, drove the animals; while Abdool Kader, after receiving some private instructions from the old woman, walked by the side of the vehicle.

Mrs. Whitby looked round for Partel Singh, who up to that time had been so loyal to her; but he had disappeared! Such was the inconsistency of the Sepoys during that crisis, that many who risked their lives in defence of the English one minute, attacked or betrayed them the next; his defection caused an ominous feeling of dread to rise in her mind. And thus Eleanor Whitby stole away from the scene of so many peaceful days and pleasant memories, a trembling

fugitive from the spot where she had so lately been the honoured mistress and a happy bride.

With many muttered oaths and threats, mingled with blows from a knotted rope, the patient, toiling beasts made their slow progress; the heavy, unoiled wheels creaked and groaned miserably; but Eleanor was on her way to safety, and heeded not such minor inconveniences. As they went down the familiar shrubby road she turned to take one last glance at the spot where she had spent so many blissful hours. As she did so, she saw that Major Page's house, the Red Bungalow, was now a sheet of fire; fierce flames were consuming its roof, their forked tongues leaping into the air. There, also, the incendiaries were still dancing like demons round the conflagration they had created; and the last sounds she heard on leaving her home, where so many soft words of love and friendship had been spoken, were wild shouts of execration, mingled with fierce threats of massacre and torture to the unbelievers, the accursed English rulers!

The road to Kurnaul lay just beyond the English cantonments, and, although it was night, they journeyed as easily as if it were broad daylight, for the sky was red with the flames of burning villas, which illuminated the country for miles round. The fugitives at length gained the outskirts of the place; but before they arrived there, Eleanor heard the profound silence of the night broken again and again by the heart-rending screams and shrieks of the hapless people who had fallen into the merciless hands of the insurgents, and whose agonizing death-cries were appalling. Also she could hear wild shouts, and outbursts of distant revelry, mingled with volleys of musketry, followed by dropping shots. But the cart slowly, though surely, travelled along the almost deserted road, unquestioned and unmolested, and these horrible sounds gradually died away in the distance. There was still some pleasure for Eleanor in the thought that every yard of that weary road brought her nearer to her husband. She was essentially a brave woman, and her personal fears were merged in intense anxiety for the man she loved, but in her heart there rose a certain bitterness against Louisa. It was to save her brother's wife that her beloved had placed his life in peril, and she reproached herself that she had allowed him to do so. Had she acted rightly? Had she not been romantically generous?

Louisa would never have done as much for her, nor indeed for anyone; and it was for this selfish, frivolous woman that she had jeopardized herself and the best of men.

‘Oh, my darling! my darling!’ she cried, ‘why did I let you go?’

They now reached some remote English houses, which had not yet been attacked, whose owners had either wisely and timely fled, or were cowering in terror in their dwellings.

‘The Sahib is here,’ said Abdool Kader, as he entered a gate leading into a shady garden. ‘Stay in the cart, lady, for fear some of the rebel soldiers get sight of you.’

In a few moments the servant returned, but not alone; Richard Whitby accompanied him, and two Sepoys of the 38th, who had remained loyal to their captain.

How his presence changed the scene!

The dangers through which she had passed—the horrid sights and sounds she had seen and heard—the past—the future—all were forgotten in the one absorbing sensation of meeting her husband again; but this happiness, so long delayed, was absolutely painful, and Eleanor could only find relief in tears.

Joy and ecstasy, the sunshine of his soul, lighted up Whitby’s worn face and shone in his fire-lit eyes. Eleanor lay sobbing in his arms, and he was trying to calm her with soft, loving words.

‘Is it really you, my darling? Can such happiness, such unlooked-for deliverance, be true? Though it seemed incredible that I had lost you in such an unexpected and horrible way, yet I dared not hope to see you again, Eleanor, having heard, from what I thought reliable authority, that you were among the missing. My poor wife! how terribly ill and worn you look!’

‘I shall be all right now,’ she answered; ‘happiness is the best tonic.’

‘Sahib,’ said one of the Sepoys, ‘we can go with you no further; you now are clear of the cantonments, and will be in less danger; though even in the open country, we hear, there are bands of cavalry wandering about.’

‘I am ready; let us start at once,’ answered Whitby; ‘if we can but reach Kurnaul all will be well. Make haste,’ he said to the driver, who, by way of assent, screwed the tails of the plodding bullocks, which torture caused them to

trot on with unwonted activity, and made the cart jolt cruelly. As they drove away, the Sepoys gave a military salute, and stood watching them out of sight.

They had now left behind them the city of Delhi, with its lurid glare of burning buildings, its appalling sounds of bloodshed and violence, and were in the still, open country. The stars glimmered peacefully in the clear, dark-blue sky, and Eleanor, after a time, laid herself down on her straw couch in the bottom of the vehicle, utterly worn out by physical weakness and mental exhaustion, and tasted God's best gift to the miserable—sleep. When morning broke, she found herself much refreshed by her slumbers; but Whitby had not taken advantage of the quiet state of the road: he was too anxious, and kept guard while his wife reposed.

The beautiful bright moonlit night had given place to the dawn of day: the broad, flat fields were bathed in a cold gray light, while the avenue of tall trees which over-arched the road was clearly visible in the early sunrise. The driver still sat on the shafts of the humble cart, whose heavy wheels creaked dolefully as the slow beasts crawled along painfully step by step. The fugitives were concealed in the vehicle, and the Moslem servant stalked along by its side.

'What is that noise!' they exclaimed, almost simultaneously.

'It sounds like guns thundering along,' said Abdool Kadar.

'No,' said Whitby; 'it is calvary. The rebels are upon us!'

At these words the bullock-driver and the panic-stricken Abdool Kader instantly abandoned the cart, and proceeded to hide themselves behind some trees.

Whitby could now see down the road what appeared to be a dark line, which was rapidly approaching, and could also hear the sound of the horses' hoofs.

'They may not notice us,' he said to his wife; 'the only thing we can do is to remain quietly here, and the soldiers may pass on.'

The bullocks, now left to themselves, tried to cross the road, out of the way of the charging cavalry, and in one moment—in less time than it takes to relate—the clumsy vehicle was upset into a ditch. Just then the horsemen

swept up, a small body of turbaned troopers, led by a plainly-dressed officer.

‘See to them, men,’ said a clear loud English voice, which sounded strangely familiar to the Whitbys; ‘there are women in that cart,’ and the officer rode towards the overturned equipage.

By this time Whitby was endeavouring to extricate his wife from the conveyance, and with the aid of some of the troopers both she and her ayah were soon on their feet. Eleanor glanced at the leader of the troop. Could she be mistaken?—a turban makes such a change in the appearance of an Englishman—but it certainly was her brother who stood before her!

‘Henry!’ she said, her voice quivering with emotion, ‘Henry!’

‘Good God!’ said Wake, for it was he, ‘is it you or your ghost? We heard that you and Richard were among the lost.’

‘We were saved almost miraculously by the assistance of that old woman, the Witch of Megara,’ said Whitby.

‘I, too, was nearly assassinated by some of the villagers of Secro, who came to recover the supposed treasure; but these men, my servants, mostly horsekeepers, defended me, and have thrown in their lot with mine. I am riding to Delhi to search for my wife. Where is Louisa?’ he continued wildly, ‘have you seen her?’

‘I believe she succeeded in getting off,’ said Eleanor somewhat bitterly, ‘for she was well mounted, and rode away from the Red House. Reginald Carew was with her.’

‘There is a report that she is a prisoner, and has been taken before the King of Delhi. If so, I will ride into his palace and demand her,’ cried Wake passionately.

‘That is madness,’ expostulated Whitby, ‘sheer madness! What can a handful of men do against a whole city risen in arms? But who says she was taken prisoner?’

‘Young Quinton of the 74th; I must know her real fate,’ he cried.

‘We can still hope she is among the fugitives,’ urged Eleanor.

‘Louisa is not at Kurnaul,’ answered her brother, ‘I am

sure of that; but I will ride up to the walls of Delhi—come what may.’

And before they could offer further remonstrance, Wake was galloping off in a whirlwind of dust down the road, followed by his men.

As the thud of the horses’ feet died away in the distance, his sister burst into tears.

‘We shall never see him again,’ she said to her husband. ‘Do you really think Louisa is a prisoner?’

‘I am surprised to find that she has not reached Kurnaul,’ he answered, ‘for she had a good horse, and several hours’ start ahead of us.’

‘But how came she to be riding your charger?’

‘She had no horse, so I placed her saddle upon mine, and we managed to recover one of Major Page’s horses for Carew. I intended myself to escape in our carriage; but, before I could get away, the mob rushed in, and I was stunned by a blow from a bludgeon. I should infallibly have been killed there and then, had not the little Witch of Megara interfered in my behalf; at her instigation my Sepoys carried me to that house in the rear of the cantonments where you found me.’

‘When shall we arrive at Kurnaul?’ asked Eleanor.

‘In twenty-four hours,’ Whitby answered. ‘We could get there much sooner had we something better than this miserable crawling means of conveyance. I am glad to learn, from what Wake said, that the rising has not yet reached that place.’

‘But, Richard, tell me what this sudden outbreak is all about? I had no idea that a revolt was brewing, and it was like a thunderbolt to me. It is true I was warned; but how could I credit that the men of the 38th, the men to whom you have been so good, and of whom you thought so highly, would have turned upon us in the way they did?’

‘I know no more than you, dearest,’ he answered. ‘I only know that this is a very critical time for our power in India. I cannot understand why no English soldiers came from Meerut. What can it mean?’

The sun was beating fiercely down on the lowly equipage the next day when they at length reached Kurnaul, which presented the appearance of an ordinary Indian station,

namely, a number of detached houses standing in gardens, surrounding a flat parade-ground, formed of green turf, now dried up with the summer's burning heat.

Their cart drew up at the door of the dâk bungalow, which they found crowded with fugitives, dismay and fear being written on every countenance. Families had been suddenly broken up and scattered, while many had lost their nearest and dearest. No one understood exactly what had happened, nor why their peaceful existence had been ruthlessly invaded by a now revolted but hitherto faithful soldiery. As to Whitby and his wife, they felt utterly crushed by the terrible calamity which had come upon them. It seemed an illusion—a dream—that but one short day ago they were in the possession of all that made life pleasant, and now they were wanderers in peril of their lives, ignorant of the fate of many whom they loved. Even Whitby, usually the most active-minded of men, now that his own soldiers had turned against him, experienced the lethargy of despair; and it seemed to him that life had no further object. To the victims of this sudden revolution, the cause from which they suffered appeared a mystery. Without dogmatically asserting what gave rise to the Mutiny—a point on which people have not yet agreed—we will show how completely it was in the nature of things, in a conquered country, especially at Delhi, which was also the greatest Mahomedan centre.

Delhi is a shrine—the Rome of Asia! For more than a thousand years all the decisive events of Indian history have been enacted there. Behind the great walls of its fortress, and within its palaces, endless civil wars, religious disputes, rebellions, and tumults, have either been originated or have actually taken place, in each of which some heroic or craven soul has played his part. Behind its magnificent fortifications what tragedies have been performed! It has been conquered by seven invaders, nearly all of whom founded a new Mahomedan dynasty. It is also a city (like modern Paris) full of the recollections of insurrection; for on the one hand there has been a tyrant king, immensely rich and powerful—‘God’s vicegerent on earth,’ as he styled himself—on the other, an uneasy, conquered people, always ready to rebel, and still more to conspire against the Divine Right of kings to govern wrong.

For eight hundred years—until British rule—Delhi had been the centre of Eastern civilization, having the one all-powerful king, the Great Mogul, who, from thence, ruled many conquered lands by subordinate Viceroys, who were themselves, in their turn, slaves at the beck and nod of this absolute despot.

The rule of the Kings of Delhi had been, in times past, a very splendid tyranny, tempered by high-sounding generous sentiments, and by an affectation of extreme justice and piety, with equality among all the Faithful. The system—such as it was—had broken down; instead of the ideal despot of iron will, a leader in battle and a Paladin of bravery (and such Turkish kings, of the race of Timour, had ruled in Delhi for centuries), absolute power passed into the hands of a line of effete sensualists, and then the magic fabric of Turkish rule fell to pieces.

It was such a degenerate 'Great Mogul' whom the English found in Delhi in 1805. He had been a prisoner in the hands of his once slave, who had blinded him. Still, the name of the house of Timour was a charm to conjure with. This 'Great Mogul,' prisoner though he was, was the legitimate sovereign in the eyes of millions—a royal Stuart or Bourbon, whom no misgovernment, and no change of fate or fortune, could divest of his sacred office of kingship. Once paralyze the minds of men with the magic of a name, and they remain for ages under the spell on their imaginations. In 1805 the English reinstated this puppet-king, gave him not only personal safety, but an income of more than £100,000 a year, and restored to him the palace and the city of Delhi, which had belonged to his ancestors.

It was the grandson of the man who owed so much to the English who rose against them in 1857

One cause of the civil wars which have rendered Indian history so incomprehensible arises from the fact that the crown did not always descend to the king's eldest son. The ruling monarch had the power to will the throne to any of his male children, to the one he deemed the fittest, or to his favourite. His sons—generally born of different mothers—hated each other from birth, and in consequence, when a king of Delhi died, a fratricidal war at once broke out, the most able or the most daring obtaining the crown, usually wading to it through the blood of all his relations. Thus it was that 'no Turk could bear a brother near the throne.'

In 1857 the old story repeated itself in Delhi. It was a fratricidal quarrel, with its usual harem intrigues, which plunged the Mogul city into civil war and bloodshed.

The King of Delhi was an old man of ninety, who had a young wife, or rather concubine, called Zeenut Mahal, and she was the mother of his youngest son, a boy of twelve. Neither wife nor child were very worthy specimens of humanity. This woman's object was to disinherit the King's four elder sons—men of mature years—for the sake of her own youthful darling, and to gain this end she had not hesitated to poison one of the senior brothers, because the English Power looked upon him as heir-apparent.

The English, represented by Lord Dalhousie, decided that the law of primogeniture should be observed. 'No hell on earth is like a woman scorned.' Zeenut Mahal's son was not to succeed to the throne of Delhi, and in revenge she determined to upset the existing order of things. She made use of the discontent existing in the army, she was party to inviting the Persians into Delhi, and she intrigued with Russia (hence the presence of the Russians there). The conspiracy was far extending and well conceived, was carried on with secrecy, and would have been much more disastrous to the English than it was, only that the match was put to the train of gunpowder before the mine had been filled with combustibles.

There was an explosion certainly (in 1857), but the damage done was not so severe as it might have been, or was intended to be. Had the plot been carried out in its entirety, not one English person would have been left alive in India, and England would have had to re-conquer that empire.

For several months prior to the outbreak, Richard Whitby knew that the Court of Delhi was simmering in hate and discontent, and he was ill at ease. From what he had observed at Agra he suspected that something was going to happen. Moreover, he had seen curiously illuminated papers posted in various parts of Delhi announcing that the Persians were coming to deliver India from British rule. Persians! absurd! he thought, with a smile; a likely story that Persians would march through all those intervening countries and the Punjaub, which was then British territory! Times were changed indeed. The Persians had conquered

Delhi, and sacked the place, a hundred and twenty years before ; the memory of their invasion was not effaced in the traditions of the people, and could never be forgotten, so terribly had they suffered, and now these Persians were figuring as good angels to deliver India from the yoke of the Christians !

In all this there was some great mystery, something which a plain captain of infantry could not understand, and for which he could offer no explanation. But now he realized that an awful crisis had come, and that if the Indian Empire was to be preserved to England, Delhi must be retaken at all costs, and that speedily.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT UMBALLA.

WHITBY and his wife, after resting during the heat of the day at Kurnaul, determined to proceed at once to Umballa. They succeeded in reaching that place by the high-road without encountering further danger, for the country on both sides of it was seemingly quiet, and they were not molested either by villagers or rebel soldiers. At Umballa there was a large garrison of English troops, and also certain native regiments, which, although they had not revolted as yet, gave great cause for anxiety ; still, on arriving at that station, the Whitbys found the ordinary routine of life apparently going on undisturbed.

As their cart made its way through the bazaars, the lowly huts of which were shaded by light-foliaged trees, they found the narrow streets crowded with people, bartering and selling in the open air, and the lively hurly-burly had quite a holiday look. There were villagers who had come in to pay the land-tax just fallen due ; there were native gentlemen of rank riding about, richly dressed, who had arrived there to proclaim their loyalty to the British Government ; there were the stiff, angular figures of the English soldiers ; and, lastly, a few Goorkas and Punjaubees, our faithful auxiliaries, clad in picturesque uniforms. The Whitbys' clumsy conveyance had great difficulty in proceeding, for, in addition to the groups already mentioned, there were detachments of troops on the march, besides

endless strings of carts, camels, and elephants, laden with grain. The sleepy station had already become a centre of stirring activity; for soldiers and provisions were being hastily collected from all quarters, as it was even then settled to make Umballa the base of operations from which to re-conquer Delhi without delay. Their humble vehicle was waiting at the side of the road to allow some troops to march past, when suddenly Eleanor's eyes fell on the familiar face of Colonel Rawley, who was riding amongst some officers; he turned, and, meeting her gaze, rode rapidly to the side of the equipage.

'Eleanor,' he said, deeply agitated, 'I had just heard that you and Whitby had arrived, but could hardly credit such good news, for at first a frightful report of your death—apparently well authenticated—had reached us. What do you know of Florence? I have heard that she has escaped from Delhi.'

'Yes,' said Whitby, 'and we may hope that she has reached Meerut safely, as we found the roads comparatively quiet; Burke and others were with her.'

'God grant it,' answered the old man; 'but I am terribly anxious until we hear something definite.'

'We have every reason to hope for the best,' said Whitby, feeling under the fatal necessity of assuming a composure he did not feel.

Colonel Rawley had aged visibly; for the last few terrible days had stamped the lines of years upon his countenance.

'I am so glad to see you and Whitby again,' continued the old soldier, 'and happier than I could have believed possible in these heart-breaking times. D——e! D——e!' becoming violently profane, and adopting his normal manner, he continued, 'I think the end of the world has come! I had taken ten days' leave, and had gone to the hills, and now those brainless noodles of the staff say that I cannot rejoin my regiment at Meerut, because the whole country is up. I am an old man, but I will soon let them see if I cannot find my own regiment. I wasn't aide-de-camp to the Duke in the Peninsula for nothing. D——e, sir! wasn't it the Ministry and the War Office who did the best they could to hamper his Grace then? Have you heard how they have been blundering at Meerut?'—then came another string of oaths. 'There was a d——d fool—a company's

officer—called Hewitt, there; and although the mutineers were burning and murdering in the station, by Gad! the fellow put a strong guard round his own house and did nothing else. By Jove! if I had been there—and there's Archdale Wilson—what the deuce was he thinking about? At Meerut, as you know, they have the three branches of the service in force—guns, cavalry, and infantry—and by Gad, sir, they did nothing! nothing! Yes, and what's more, let the native cavalry ride off to Delhi and join the old King—scoundrel that he is! It is enough to make the Duke rise from his grave! The service has gone to the dogs, and the country is going to the devil. If we only had Charley Napier here! Didn't he say that all this would happen? Didn't he tell those blockheads that Delhi and the native army were in a most ticklish state? And who believed him? None of them. And now, sir, here am I without my men and Florrie—Florrie——' but here the old man quite broke down, and putting spurs to his horse, rode rapidly away.

'Poor old fellow!' said Whitby pityingly; 'he has been a fine soldier in his day, but I much fear that men of his years will not be able to stand a campaign in this heat. By Jove! there is Hodson. He is the man for these times! I served with him in the Punjaub, therefore I know he is every inch a soldier.'

At this moment that officer, who was riding furiously along, suddenly drew rein at the side of the bullock-cart.

'Dick Whitby,' he called out, 'I am glad to see you. I did not know you had escaped. The crisis is awful, but,' he continued, with a bright smile, 'with God and our Saxon right arm we will pull through, never fear.'

The speaker was a handsome man, well made, lithe and agile. He looked particularly well on horseback, and rode like a centaur. His light curly hair slightly receded from a high and most intellectual forehead. On first seeing this remarkable man, of whom she had heard so much, and also much not to his credit, Eleanor Whitby scanned his face with interest. She saw that his blue eyes were animated by a peculiarly determined and sometimes even fierce look, which would change to one of mischievous merriment, for, like all clever people, he was keenly susceptible of the ridiculous, in whatever shape it presented itself. His nose

inclined to the aquiline, and the curved thin nostrils added a look of defiance in no way counteracted by the compressed lips, which seemed to denote many an inward struggle between duty and inclination.

‘Troops are marching into the station from all quarters,’ Hodson continued, with animation. ‘The 75th have come down from Kussowlie, and my regiment, the 1st Fusiliers, and the Commander-in-Chief—General Anson—are expected hourly. Every nerve is being strained to get ready to march upon Delhi; but, as usual, the departments have utterly broken down—there is no carriage for the troops, no food, and no doctors. Still, from the Commander-in-Chief down to the private, every man is eager to press on to Delhi, but the means to do so are not immediately forthcoming. To find food, collect carts, and get camels together will keep everybody in the Quartermaster-General’s department in a state of ceaseless activity. We must retake Delhi, and that at once, or our Indian Empire is lost! Introduce me to your wife before I leave, Whitby. I heard you had become a Benedict, the best state for any man,’ he added with a bright smile. He was a married man himself, and his devotion to his wife was phenomenal.

Poor Eleanor blushed crimson to the roots of her hair under the scrutiny of those keen blue eyes. She felt the humiliating consciousness that she looked ‘a perfect fright,’ in her once white muslin dress, which had not been changed for days, and her disordered hair. Hodson seemed not to notice any of these things, and soon after left.

‘What a handsome man!’ she cried, with feminine enthusiasm, ‘and how well he rides! He can’t be a thief.’

Whitby laughed bitterly. ‘I think that he is not. “For envy they delivered Him to the chief priests.” These words are the true key to many a persecution. The fact is, he is too noble to pass through the world without detractors. The ambitious and the brave are jealous of him because the brilliancy of his acts puts them in the shade; for he is more like Bayard, or Amadis de Gaul, than a subaltern of this nineteenth century.’

They were making their way to the house of a mere acquaintance of Captain Whitby’s.

‘I only just know Murray,’ said Whitby ‘He is a major in the 107th N.I., a very good fellow, and his wife is as kind

as he is himself. They will receive us if they can ; at all events we will look them up, and if the house is full of fugitives like ourselves, I shall apply to the military authorities for shelter.'

They drove or rather crawled in their bullock-cart to the Murrays' house, which was the usual detached bungalow standing in a garden, and were most hospitably welcomed by Mrs. Murray, who soon furnished Eleanor with some articles of clothing from that store which had been collected by the ladies of Umballa for the use of the escapees—Eleanor, like most other people, having fled with only the clothes she was wearing. Their good-natured hostess conducted them to a large airy apartment, which was as cool as any habitation could be at that time of the year, being on the north side of the house. The exhausted travellers were refreshed by cold baths and fragrant tea, and then, utterly worn out by fatigue, added to days of extreme danger and suspense, they lay down, and were soon fast asleep.

That night the alarm sounded ; for it was feared the native troops had mutinied. Everything became movement and excitement, carriages were got in readiness, and all the ladies of Umballa were ordered to seek shelter in the barracks of the 9th Lancers. The scare, however, was a false one ; the native troops did not rise that night, nor (as time proved) did they rise at all in that cantonment, but were eventually disarmed. Still nearly every night the alarm rang out, and the English soldiers were kept under arms, while the ladies and children took refuge in the barracks, returning to the houses in the morning. Moreover, the sky was nightly crimsoned by incendiary fires, which were only extinguished with difficulty, and the perpetrators of these outrages were rarely, if ever, discovered.

Several changes took place directly after the arrival of General Anson, the Commander-in-Chief. Colonel Rawley was made a Brigadier of the Delhi Field Force, for which every effort was being made to collect troops, and 'old Rawley' had asked for Whitby as his staff officer. His request was granted, and then Whitby became a Brigade-Major. Another promotion gave Richard Whitby almost as much pleasure as his own 'luck,' as he called it, which was that Hodson, but so lately disgraced by the musty old Court of Directors in far-away Leadenhall Street, was placed by

General Anson on the Head-Quarter staff, and appointed Assistant Quartermaster-General. 'His enemies will hate him more than ever,' laughed Whitby, when he heard the news, 'but he is the right man, and now we shall soon get to Delhi!'

One night in May, Eleanor, who had, as usual, gone to the barracks, had just fallen asleep in a private room, which a sergeant of the 9th Lancers had good-naturedly placed at Whitby's disposal, when the following adventure befell her. She was roused from her slumbers by the abrupt entrance of someone into the apartment. 'This is a very good room,' said a harsh unmusical voice, and Eleanor found the speaker was a middle-aged woman of very alarming presence, and with a Saracenic cast of features. Behind the invader stood a stout but younger-looking lady, and further still in dim perspective was to be seen luggage, and a multitude of servants. The stranger who had first entered turned and eyed Eleanor severely.

'Mrs. Whitby!' said the formidable lady, addressing Eleanor, who was now sitting up in bed, rubbing her eyes, to find out if she were not dreaming, 'Mrs. Whitby! it is very extraordinary that you should have taken this room. I am the wife of the Commissioner of Samwalnugger, and this is my sister, the wife of the Judge of Jumbopore. What business have you here?'

'Oh,' said Eleanor, 'there must be some mistake; this room was lent to Captain Whitby, and he brought me here.'

'Most unaccountable of Captain Whitby to take this apartment!' said the lady, standing by Eleanor's bedside, and looking at her with a glance of majestic displeasure; 'quarters always go by seniority of rank. My position entitles me to the best room in the barracks, and I certainly shall not give up my rights to the wife of a mere captain.'

While she was talking, a regiment of black servants and coolies entered in Indian file, one carrying a camp-bed, another the bedding, some brought chairs, others tables and every sort of household stuff, including a spit, a bunch of onions, and a live fowl securely tied by the legs, and this impedimenta was quickly deposited with much noise round Eleanor's bed. Accommodation in the barracks that night was evidently very limited, for now another female appeared upon the scene; as the last comer entered the room, the authoritative lady turned round.

‘What!’ she cried, ‘that creature sleep in the same room with us! Do they mix up common people and ladies together in this barrack? Preposterous!’ and she looked with scorn at the woman—a Mrs. Rattle, a sergeant’s wife—who, however, taking no notice of her indignant protest, quietly spread a mattress upon the floor, and laid herself down upon it.

The servants had, meanwhile, rapidly prepared two camp-beds for the ladies, and the two matrons, finding all remonstrance useless, and that there was no other room empty, owing to the number of fugitives who had poured into Umballa, screwed up their scanty locks, and enclosed their uncomely faces in large frilled nightcaps, grumbling all the time at every petty discomfort, as if they were travellers at an hotel.

‘I must say,’ remarked the wife of the Commissioner, ‘that my ayah is very stupid. She brought away nothing but my red satin dress. One does at least expect presence of mind in servants. It is no use her saying she was confused; *that* is the very thing I complain of.’

‘And I am vexed with myself,’ said the Judge’s lady, ‘for I brought away my medicine-chest instead of my jewel-case. I snatched up the wrong box in my hurry, and so lost my diamonds, and only saved some physic.’

‘And to think of my beautiful house at Samwahnugger being burnt,’ said Mrs. Commissioner Blogg.

Just then there was the sound of a step on the stone pavement of the veranda outside, and the clanging of a sword, and through the French window (which also served as a door) there strode the tall soldierly form of Richard Whitby. For a moment he stood dismayed in the middle of the room, surveying the matronly ladies in their *deshabille*; then arose a discordant screeching, the ayahs shrieked in acute falsetto, and their mistresses ‘skirled’ as if the whole harmony of the thing depended on their exertions, while Mrs. Rattle sat up on her mattress and laughed uproariously.

Whitby hastily retreated, amid confused denunciations and hysterical outcries, mingled with the vociferous laughter of the sergeant’s wife; while Eleanor put on some clothing, and followed her lord into the veranda.

‘How awkward!’ laughed Whitby, throwing away the end of the cigar he had been smoking; ‘but how was I to

know that all the beldams of the garrisons had assembled in your room ?

Eleanor did not remain long with her husband, as he had military duties which called him away ; but when she returned to her sleeping apartment she found the window fastened, and therefore had to knock for admittance. While the bars and bolts were being withdrawn she could hear the sound of female voices apparently engaged in animated strife, and as she entered the room she was addressed by the majestic lady of the Commissioner of Samwalnugger.

‘ Shut up every place again ! ’ said Mrs. Blogg, in a tone of authority. ‘ I insist that the doors and windows be not only fastened, but barricaded. Captain Whitby’s intrusion on the wife of one of the highest civil officials in the district is most unwarrantable, and besides, Mrs. Whitby, I have been insulted by that creature ’—pointing to Mrs. Rattle—‘ *and I hold you responsible* for everything she has said, for you should not have allowed her to enter the place.’

‘ I am very sorry,’ faltered Eleanor.

Mrs. Blogg’s terrific countenance gleamed wrathfully from beneath her frilled nightcap, and her big nose projected far beyond its snowy border, making an observer think that the rest of her body was a mere appendage to this formidable feature of her face. She continued indignantly :

‘ The wife of a commissioner not respected even in her bed ! ’

There was a look of suppressed power, a mysterious reserve of wrath, about the lady, which froze Eleanor’s very soul. Mrs. Whitby was courageous in real danger, but she had a well-bred Englishwoman’s morbid horror of anything like a scene, and the amazing insolence of Mrs. Blogg prostrated her reasoning faculties.

The tyrannical lady then ordered Mrs. Rattle to bar the window.

‘ No ! that I won’t,’ returned the ‘ common woman ’ angrily. ‘ You, ma’am,’ she continued, addressing Eleanor, ‘ ought to have more spirit than to be trampled on by her. At Samwalnugger Mrs. Blogg said false things of me ; all along of spite, because the gentlemen talked to me, and did not notice her ! ’

Eleanor discovered from these recriminations that the quarrelsome strangers were refugees from the same place.

Mrs. Rattle continued : ' I ain't going to be baked in an oven for anyone ! I shall open all the doors and windows, and let in the cool air this hot night ; ' and so saying, she began to put her words into deeds. ' You never was very handsome,' she said to the two irate sisters ; ' if Captain Whitby did see you, what does it matter ? '

However, this feminine quarrel ended, like many graver ones, in a most unexpected manner ; the wife of the Commissioner of Samwalnugger burst into a fit of weeping, and whimpered, in the most womanly way, that she would ' tell her husband.'

Mrs. Whitby had felt extremely uncomfortable at Mrs. Blogg's rudeness, and at Mrs. Rattle's remarks, but in the turmoil and excitement of their present life all conventional prejudice and belief had given way, so that it did not seem so very wonderful, after all, that Mrs. Commissioner Blogg and Mrs. Rattle should have disturbed her slumbers by a scolding match ; but soon all was forgotten, for the time being, in darkness and sleep ; but at the earliest streak of dawn the next morning Eleanor stole silently away from the explosive neighbourhood of Mrs. Blogg and Mrs. Rattle, and returned to Major Murray's house.

Soon afterwards a general order was issued that no member of the nobler sex was to enter the sacred precincts of those apartments, in the barracks of the 9th Lancers, devoted to the use of ladies. Whether this was due to this row, or some other cause, ' history does not relate.' However, Mrs. Blogg filled the ears of sympathizing Umballa with pathetic complaints of ' the infamous conduct of Captain and Mrs. Whitby,' and Society fancied she had been wronged. O Justice ! Justice ! why dost thou, in this lower world, so often hide thy countenance ?

Of course, kind friends repeated to Mrs. Whitby what Mrs. Blogg had said ; but what was the petty malevolence of a silly old woman to her ? ' The waves and the billows had gone over ' Eleanor. Where was her brother ? where was Florence ? where was Burke ? where, even, were Louisa Page and Carew ? And some unseen voice seemed to murmur, Dead ! The horizon of her life seemed bounded on all sides by nameless terrors, and she could hardly believe that she lived—the survivor of such horrors. She missed the daily companionship of gentle Florence, who had

been more like a sister than a cousin, and she missed, too, the light-hearted gaiety of the irrepressible Burke. Horrible tales and rumours were in the air. On the 16th of May they heard that all the English women and children in the city of Delhi had been massacred in the presence of the King of Delhi's sons.

One morning Eleanor would rise bright with hope: those she loved were safe, they must have reached Meerut, no news was good news; the next she was crushed with despair: they had not heard, therefore something dreadful had happened, and the possible fate of her friends was never out of her mind for a single minute.

The Whitbys had been some days at Umballa, and Eleanor was standing at the door of the Murrays' house awaiting the return of her husband. She saw him approach, and was struck by the look of grave sorrow on his face. She felt sure at once that something terrible had happened, and dreaded the evil tidings which his disturbed bearing seemed to portend. A tall Sikh—a groom, lately in their service—followed Whitby at a short distance.

'Oh, Richard! I fear you bring bad news!' she said.

'It is very bad news,' he answered sadly.

'Is it about Florence and Burke?'

'I have hardly the heart to speak about it,' he replied, 'and yet it must be told.'

'Oh! do not say it is about Florence!' cried his wife, white with fear.

'Alas! I greatly fear that poor Carew has been killed, and Florence and Burke with him.'

'But it may not be true, Dick,' she urged; 'you know there are so many false reports circulated.'

'I wish to God we were sure of its falsity,' he answered; 'this melancholy token tells its own tale, and cannot be disbelieved.'

He showed his wife a small sheet of paper, evidently torn from a note-book, on which the following words were scrawled in pencil: 'Good-bye! good-bye! dear friends.—Florrie.'

'It is poor Florence's writing,' he continued; 'it is her last farewell to us, and this man'—pointing to the groom—'brought it.'

He then cross-questioned him as to the fate of their friends.

‘I was with Miss Florence and Burke Sahib,’ said the servant, ‘when they escaped from Delhi over the city wall. There were some Sahibs and ladies with them, whose names are unknown to me. That same night we met Carew Sahib and Miss Page in the open fields; they were on foot, for thieves had robbed them of their horses, and threatened to murder them. They had only escaped with their lives. The Sahibs and the ladies wished to reach Meerut; they hid in the woods by day, and travelled in the night-time. When they had arrived at the townlet of Doobghur, the villagers of that place, being Hindoos, were friendly, and gave them food, but the Newab of Doobghur, hearing that English were hid in the place, stirred up the rabble, and led them to attack the house where the Sahibs and ladies were concealed. They had not expected this, for the Newab had made Carew Sahib believe he was friendly to him; but he deceived him. When the mob beset the place, the Sahibs and the ladies went on the flat roof of the house; they had but one sword and one gun to defend themselves with. The Sahibs fought bravely. Carew Sahib only ceased when his right arm was disabled. When Miss Florence saw that death was certain, she wrote a letter, and begged me to take it to you; I climbed over the roof, and afterwards got away in a boat. Burke Sahib was young and strong; he fought bravely; with his own hand he killed five rebels. Then the people feared the brave young Sahib, and they cried (by the Newab’s orders), “Give up Carew Sahib, and you shall live.” But he would not desert his countryman, and, unless God has preserved them, they have all died together on the roof.’

‘But those villains never killed the ladies!’ exclaimed Whitby.

‘Some ladies were killed, Sahib, I am sure. I saw one body, stripped naked, lying in the sun; the face was all disfigured. Yet some say that Miss Page and Miss Rawley were not killed, but were sent to Delhi by the King’s orders. I do not know this; I have told you what I have seen.’

Dead—or prisoners in such hands! To be assured that they no longer lived seemed to Whitby preferable to the possibility of their still being in the power of barbarous enemies. It is impossible to describe the feelings of this

usually calm man, on hearing the fate of his friends. It brought to light passions that in happier, quieter times remain altogether inert in the heart.

‘What shall we do?’ sobbed Eleanor; ‘ought we to tell Florence’s father?’

‘Who would dare to be the bearer of such dreadful news?’ asked Whitby. ‘I think uncertainty as to her fate would be preferable to these awful tidings. If ever I find the scoundrel by whose instigation they were attacked, I will shoot him like a dog!’

It was crimes such as this which maddened the minds even of the most just and generous of men.

The Whitbys agreed that they would keep the fate of Florence as much from the ears of the world as possible. It seemed to them almost a sacrilege that the probable fate of this sweet and pure young girl should become the talk of camps or the gossip of society.

In the first shock of this overwhelming calamity Eleanor thought she could never smile again. Life was too terrible, too mysterious; she almost doubted the justice of Heaven in permitting such atrocities; but in the heart of her husband there was but one desire, and that was—vengeance!

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DECISIVE BATTLE.

It was still the fatal month of May, when Whitby received the following laconic note in pencil from Hodson:

‘Come here at once. I have something of importance to communicate.

‘W. H.’

He rode off immediately, notwithstanding that the rays of the sun like molten lead were streaming upon him, for it was twelve o’clock, and the atmosphere resembled liquid fire. When he arrived at Hodson’s quarters, he found him booted and spurred, surrounded by a multitude of natives, to whom he was giving orders, while a white Persian cat followed him about, even escaping from the caresses of others to nestle near him. As the noted soldier threw himself down on an easy-chair, the animal rubbed itself

against him, whisking its long tail against its master's fair moustache, and courting further notice when he good-naturedly stroked its arched back.

'My dear fellow,' said Hodson, 'I have scarcely a minute to spare, and must be as brief as I can, for I am just starting for Kurnaul. I suppose you have heard that I am now at the head of the Intelligence Department?'

Whitby assented: 'I heard it with great pleasure,' he said.

'Well, in my official capacity, I have just had a most extraordinary application brought to me, which I am requested to forward to his Excellency. I cannot pretend to understand this affair, neither does my one-eyed friend, Moulvie Rujub Ali. Come here, Moulvie Sahib,' he called pleasantly, and a little wizened old man wearing a large turban appeared, and salaamed courteously.

'He is to be trusted,' whispered Hodson to Captain Whitby; 'he is one of Sir Henry Lawrence's old friends, and through him I get the best news in the country.'

'Sahib,' said the old Moulvie to Whitby, 'do you know the Newab of Doobghur?'

Whitby's eyes flashed furiously.

'The treacherous villain!' he said, 'what of him?'

'He has sent an emissary, an old woman, to his Excellency; she comes from this Rohilla—a race always cursed and perfidious—to treat for the ransom of some English prisoners who are in his fort at Doobghur. He offers to protect them, if the English Government will restore to him the stolen treasure of one Ali Kareem. Who is Ali Kareem? God only knows; yet his wealth is valued at a million of money. Is Doobghur mad, that he should ask for such a sum, when there is no longer any wealth in the English treasury?'

Hodson's piercing eyes were riveted on Whitby's face.

'I sent for you, as the old woman, a reputed witch and prophetess, declares you can give up the treasure. I have cross-questioned her, and, though she is evidently mad, I am satisfied that a party of fugitives are in Doobghur's fort.'

Whitby explained that Ali Kareem's wealth had passed into Miss Page's hands, and that, if it could be restored, she must do it. 'The worst part of the affair is,' cried Whitby, 'that a young girl, a cousin of my wife's, Miss Rawley,

Brigadier Rawley's daughter, and Burke, of the 200th Regiment, to whom she is engaged, are in Doobghur's fort—at least, we think so, we hope so. They have nothing to do with Miss Page's treasure, and yet I fear that their lives will depend upon its being returned.'

'I don't think Doobghur will kill his prisoners, as he hopes to get a heavy ransom for them, otherwise his Mahomedan fanaticism might prompt him to do it. I shall be passing near Doobghur on my way to Meerut, and I will let the villain know that if the fugitives are sent in he will be handsomely rewarded, and if not, that I will catch him and hang him!'

When Hodson had left, Whitby spoke to the emissary, who was, as he suspected, the Witch of Megara. She was seated in the veranda of the house, guarded by policemen.

'Who are in the fort?' he asked of her.

'Miss Page, Miss Rawley, the Lawyer Sims, Burke Sahib, and Carew Sahib, and others from Delhi unknown to me. You had better promise the treasure; it may go ill with them if you do not.'

'It is not my habit to make promises which I cannot keep.'

'But the Government might promise it.'

'The Government will reward the Newab if he protects these English, and is loyal; if not, it will be the worse for him.'

'Is that your final answer, Sahib?'

'What can I answer? I am no dealer in lies,' said Whitby.

'That is why I require your word. If you say the treasure will be restored, you will keep your engagement.'

'When peace returns, the treasure may be recovered. What more can I answer? Is Wake Sahib in the fort? for if anyone can pay the ransom required, he is the person who will do it.'

'Wake Sahib!' she answered excitedly; 'no! he rode through the town of Doobghur in open day, and no one had the power to touch him; for does he not carry on his person a powerful talisman, which men and spirits must obey? Get me the magic crystal he possesses, and Ali Kareem's treasure may go, for on whichever side in battle that charm is found, there victory follows.'

Whitby smiled incredulously.

'God gives victory, and English courage and prudence have been successful hitherto, and will be so again,' he said. 'I have no fear of the triumph of our cause. I greatly dread, however, that evil may befall that poor girl, Miss Rawley.'

'She is safe, she is protected by a shining one' (guardian angel). 'Do you not see her? There!'

As in a vision Whitby saw the gold hair, and bright, childish face of Florence Rawley. He started as if in a dream; he felt sure it was a trick of his imagination, while the old necromancer sat unconcernedly gazing on the ground.

'Sahib,' she said, 'they will not let me return. I also am a prisoner, for they will have it I am a rebel,' and the old hag laughed unpleasantly; 'but it does not matter, I can leave in spite of their guard.'

'She was found in the bazaar, inciting Sepoys to mutiny,' explained the policemen.

'A hanging matter in these times,' thought Whitby, 'I must do what I can for her;' therefore he told Moulvie Rujub Ali that the old woman had saved his wife in the rising of Delhi.

'Nevertheless, she is a ringleader among the disaffected,' he answered, 'but I will see that she is well treated.'

Afterwards the witch escaped from custody—by necromancy, her guard asserted, but doubtless by that silver key which opens all gaols.

At that time, when Hodson's preternatural energy and knowledge of war were invaluable to the English cause, no deed of his was more daring, or fruitful in good results, than his celebrated ride with despatches to Meerut. He started on the 20th May from Kurnaul, he rode a distance of seventy-six miles in seven hours, through a country held by the rebels, having only one led horse and a small escort of Sikh cavalry. After delivering his papers to the Brigadier of Meerut, General Wilson, he had a bath, some breakfast, and two hours' sleep, after which he rode back, having to fight his way for about thirty miles of the distance.

This gallant exploit was of great assistance to the English in the hostilities which followed, for until Hodson's daring ride there had been no communication between the English at Umballa and Meerut, and he carried the orders for the

Meerut troops to join the Delhi Field Force. Ever considerate for others, Hodson on his return telegraphed at once to Whitby: 'Have failed; the prisoners have left Doobghur.'

The mutiny broke out on the 10th May, but it was not until the 8th June, nearly a month later, that the first battle to regain Delhi was fought. There had been a certain delay in collecting troops; moreover, the Commander-in-Chief, General Anson, had died of cholera, and had been succeeded by Sir H. Barnard. Another victim to the scourge of the climate was Brigadier Rawley, who died suddenly of congestion of the brain, brought on by exposure to the sun, joined to mental anxiety as to the fate of his daughter. When he found she had been removed from Doobghur, and nothing further was known of her and her companions, a settled despondency took possession of his mind, which, added to the deadly heat, was more than his hitherto vigorous constitution could bear.

On the 6th of June all the forces were assembled at a small village called Alipore, some ten miles from Delhi, and there they waited until the English troops from Meerut joined them. Alipore resembled the ordinary townlet of Northern India. It consisted of a small number of mean houses forming one main street—the bazaar. The place was surrounded by a clay wall, fallen into decay; it stood in the midst of broad wheat-fields, and on one side there was a dense grove of mango trees. Above these trees the most marked feature of the place appeared—the tall graceful minarets of its mosque, erected when the Moslem rule was all-powerful. A river ran near at hand, which gave the promise of water for ablutions and for drinking to the English army, who had suddenly appeared before this obscure village. A great number of British non-combatants, women, children, and sick, went with the army, in order to have the protection of the fighting men. It was thought they could reach Meerut, and thence be despatched to England; it was not then known that the whole country for three hundred miles below Meerut was in a flame of insurrection. Whitby was still Brigade-Major to the successor of poor Rawley, and his wife was with him at Alipore. Everyone expected there would shortly be a battle, as it had been ascertained that 2,000 rebels had come out of Delhi to oppose the return of the English troops into that city.

On the morning of the 7th of June the troops from Meerut were seen approaching. First came the artillery, Scott's and Tombs' Batteries, then two 18-pounder guns, next the Carabineers, followed by some picturesque-looking Afghan troopers, the retainers of the Chief Jan Fishan Khan, and then came the infantry, consisting of some Goorkas, a wing of the Rifles in their dark uniform, and lastly, some companies of the, to us, familiar red coats of the 200th Regiment. The force from Meerut looked travel-stained and way-worn, for they had marched fifty miles in burning heat, and had fought two battles, in which the rebels had been beaten, the first turning of the tide in favour of the English in that part of India. While the Meerut troops were marching in to Alipore amid vociferous cheering from the Umballa soldiers, Eleanor Whitby and her husband, who were among the spectators, were astonished to see Henry Wake. He was again in the dress of a private, and again in the ranks of the 200th Regiment.

After the men had fallen out, Wake made his way to the Whitbys, and was soon locked in his sister's arms.

'You must have been surprised to see me to-day,' he said. 'After leaving you on the road to Delhi, I ascertained that Carew and Louisa had passed the ford of Baghput, and were seemingly making their way to Meerut, but I was too late to help them. As far as I could discover then, most of the English fugitives were murdered by the villagers of Doobghur. I succeeded in getting away myself only with great difficulty, and after many hairbreadth escapes found myself once again in the old familiar cantonments of Meerut. These are times when every man ought to fight. I re-enlisted in the old regiment, and was most cordially welcomed back by both officers and men. Fancy, old Maunders commands the 200th, and a very good C.O. he makes.'

'You might serve as an officer and get the resignation of your commission withdrawn,' said Whitby.

'No; I had better keep quiet, and am very well contented to be where I am. That affair of the treasure and the fakir might be inquired into. But Louisa is safe! Do you know about them?'

'No, nothing certain. We have been so anxious,' said Eleanor.

'Louisa managed to send a letter to Maunders. They

are all concealed in Doobghur's house in Delhi; Carew wounded, but doing well. They are kindly treated, and as soon as peace is established I have agreed to divide the treasure with Doobghur. Louisa knows how to get on with these people; she speaks their language perfectly, and she is so clever. We shall be in Delhi directly, and then it will be all right,' said Wake.

'I believe they are safe, because Doobghur will be afraid to lose the price of their ransom,' said Whitby.

'It is delightful to know you think so,' said Eleanor.

'Our friend Maunders, whom we had looked upon as the laziest of mortals, is, after all, a perfect hero,' continued Wake. 'The mutineers had taken up their position in the town of Ghazee-ooden-Nugger, which is a fairly large place full of narrow streets, defended by a wall, and is situated about a mile from the river Hindun. Our infantry were trying to take the town, and Tombs with his horse artillery, accompanied by the Carabineers, galloped across a ford in the river, and assailed the enemy's flank. Some of the mutineers had taken refuge in a strong suburb, from which it was necessary to dislodge them at the point of the bayonet—a difficult and dangerous task. Our regiment was ordered up, and our boys, being mostly recruits, when met by a murderous fire, were inclined to waver; then Maunders, spurring his horse over a mud wall, made straight for a large body of rebels, where he was seen dealing blows right and left with his sword. Of course, after that, the men followed; they scaled the wall and drove every mutineer out of the place. It was very foolhardy of Maunders, but it was a magnificent action! He will get the Victoria Cross at least, and his gallant conduct will be mentioned in despatches. They call him the hero of "Ghazee-ooden-Nugger!"'

At this moment a curly figure appeared at the door of the tent. It was no other than Major Maunders himself; he had obtained his majority not by the gazetting of Blackistone, but by the death of Colonel Rawley.

'You here, Mrs. Whitby!' he exclaimed; 'how delighted I am to see you! What dreadful times! there's not a drop of iced water to be had. Fancy actively serving one's country with the thermometer standing at 110° in the shade!'

The Major seated himself on a small camp-bed, almost the only piece of furniture the Whitbys possessed, while Eleanor was making use of a camel trunk in lieu of an arm-chair.

‘By Gad!’ continued the Major; ‘just fancy paying £2,500 for the privilege of being permitted to die of thirst!’

‘Oh, Major Maunders!’ said Eleanor, ‘I have just been hearing of your most gallant exploit at the battle of the Hindun. You are quite the hero of the camp!’

The poor Major turned pale and heaved a bitter sigh.

‘My dear madam, I implore you not to speak to me of that unfortunate episode. People will go on expecting me to perform deeds of heroism for my country’s good, and, at my time of life, it is a dreadful thing to be mistaken for a knight of chivalry. But I will confess to you what I had not the courage to tell the regiment (who, by-the-bye, would not have believed me). I was riding a horse of poor Burke’s, who, you know, had a taste for horseflesh. It was his Irish hunter, Ballymachree, and had not been trained to stand fire, besides being a hard-mouthed brute. So, when the musket-shots came peppering about us like hail, he took the bit between his teeth, and made straight for the enemy’s lines—bolted, in fact! I would have given worlds to have been able to turn his head the other way! I declare I was never in such a blue funk in all my life as when Ballymachree rose to that high wall and nimbly cleared it, just touching it with his hind legs in true Irish style. Bless my soul! The enemy were nearly as scared at our sudden appearance amongst them as I was myself; but, however, after a minute or two, they came on with their tulwars, and, of course, I had to hit out with my sword in self-defence, while the wild antics and plunging of my war-steed made it almost impossible to keep my seat. But before I had undergone the ignominy of falling off, the men of my company came up, and the rebels thought it best to retreat; and I was greatly relieved to see them scampering away at the double, I can tell you, and I immediately took the opportunity of dismounting, covered with laurels and confusion. Ah, my dear Mrs. Whitby, I am a hero in spite of myself, and, by Gad! I fear I shall have to live up to my new character, which will be very hard on a man who has

served her Majesty for twenty-five years in all parts of the world! By Gad! they will call on me now to lead every forlorn hope!

His auditors could not help laughing at the unexpected predicament so drolly related. The stout Major soon after retired, to see after his men and make arrangements for the battle of next day.

At early dawn all was confusion in the camp, it having been reported that the enemy's cavalry were advancing upon them. There had been grave doubts and differences the evening before as to the real position which the rebels had taken up to dispute the English advance on Delhi. The camp at Alipore was covered by a strong advance guard of all arms, with a breastwork thrown up across the road, a couple of guns loaded with grape, and port-fires burning.

Soon a small cloud of dust was noticed ahead, on the road from Delhi. All were on the alert. On it came, nearer and nearer; it was evidently cavalry. It was within three hundred yards—a few yards more and the guns would have opened on them, when the foremost of the party turned off sharp to the right, followed by about a dozen sowars. It was an Englishman—it was Hodson! He had been out to examine for himself the position of the rebels, and solve the doubts of the evening before, and on his report the attack for the following day was planned.

The alarm was momentary. Almost before the men could form, the mistake had been discovered, and they returned to their quarters.

Hodson pulled up at the door of Whitby's tent, and said excitedly:

'Whitby! everything is ready for the coming struggle. The rebels have taken up a very formidable position at an enclosed building, called Budlee-ka-Serai, about five miles on this side of the city, with a broad and deep jheel protecting their right from the possibility of a flank attack. On their left there is low, marshy ground for miles, with the Nujufgurh Jheel Canal running parallel to the road, so that an attack in front is the only course open to us. The main-road, by which our advance must be made, runs between the Serai and the jheel. They have not been slow to avail themselves of the natural advantages of their position and to improve them. About a hundred and fifty yards

in front of the Serai there are two ruined summer-houses, one on each side; and here the rebels have established a couple of batteries and some light field-pieces, and in front of the Serai they have planted some heavy guns to sweep the whole of the open ground. They have also placed large *gunlahs* (earthen jars) 'painted white, at intervals, to enable them accurately to mark the distance and regulate the elevation of their guns. To such an extent have they turned to good account the time which our delay in advancing has given them. We will give the rebels a rude awakening at this time to-morrow.'

And so saying, he rode away as usual.

'Do you see that fellow?' said Maunders to Whitby. 'I was one night on outlying picket at Meerut. At about 3 o'clock I heard my advanced sentries firing. I rode off to see what was the matter, and was told that a part of the enemy's cavalry had approached their post, but, when day broke, in galloped Hodson! He had brought despatches for Wilson. How I quizzed him for approaching an armed post at night without knowing the parole! I call all this scampering about very unbecoming an officer and a gentleman; and if this style of thing is to become the fashion in her Majesty's forces, by Gad! I'll send in my papers, though we are on active service. What a crazy, uncomfortable fellow he is, doing everybody's work, and putting a finger in every pie! Why, Whitby, no one will talk of the hero of Ghazee-ooden-Nugger with any enthusiasm if Hodson charges the enemy single-handed every day of the week!'

The next day, the 8th of June, the battle of Budlee-ka-Serai took place. The English force could only be calculated in round numbers, 170 cavalry and 1,900 infantry, with 14 guns in the two infantry brigades; and in that under Brigadier Hope Grant about 350 cavalry with 10 guns; while there remained behind, as a rear-guard and to protect the siege-train, a squadron of the 6th Carabineers, a company of the 2nd Bengal Fusiliers, 2 guns Scott's battery, and the Jheend Rajah's contingent.

It was barely light when the troops began to defile out of the camp, on the morning of the 8th June. Mrs. Whitby and some other ladies watched the attacking force as they marched out. There was a brightness in every man's face, a gay elasticity in their movements, for they realized that

they were at length going to battle, to avenge so much wrong, so much cruelty. Cavalry and guns thundered past, followed by the infantry, with measured tread; then came the General, Sir H. Barnard, with his staff—the aristocracy of that minute—a gay cavalcade of red and gold uniforms and nodding white plumes. Whitby was riding in the General's *cortège*, and, while his wife's eyes lighted with pleasure at the sight of her loved one, he passed by and had not even noticed her. This grieved her gentle heart. He seemed so remote as he rode along in the midst of his companions-in-arms, and, in truth, the all-absorbing duties and anxieties of the day of battle had banished all else from his mind for the time being.

An hour passed, and Eleanor and her companions could plainly hear the long-continued roar of the guns; but no tidings reached them as to which side was gaining or losing. It was indeed a time of intense suspense and fear to those anxious women; but at length Mrs. Whitby perceived the figure of a man evidently making for their camp. As he drew near she saw that his face was blackened with powder, while his clothes were torn to shreds.

'Hurrah! hurrah!' he cried, excitedly waving his hat as he came up to her; 'it is a great victory! The rebels are in full retreat! Richard is safe! He has sent me (as I am slightly wounded) to bring you to the front, and, please God, to-morrow we shall all be in Delhi. Hurrah!' Wake certainly was barely recognisable, so deplorable was his condition; but the tone of his voice, and his joyful news, secured his welcome, and established his identity. Orders to strike the Whitbys' tent were at once given, and while this was being done and the little property they had with them was being packed into a cart, he said, in answer to Eleanor's eager questions:

'When we got orders to march last evening we hardly knew where we were going, but we felt certain that something sharp was contemplated, for the word was given that our sick and non-combatants were to be left behind; but they objected, so afterwards they were taken with us; had they stayed behind, and we had got beaten, they would probably have been cut to pieces. We started down the high-road, which, as you know, is planted with trees on both sides, whose overhanging branches form a shady avenue;

but our progress was but slow at first, for the whole road was blocked with commissariat carts and ammunition waggons. The artillery who were in front fired several rounds at the enemy, who returned their fire. We were following the guns, when a cry was raised "Form square! Form square! the cavalry are upon us." (This was a mistake—it was our own cavalry which had been seen.) We got all huddled in a heap and made the best square we could, but there was no uniformity in it; no man could get at his "Brown Bess," while the front rank was kneeling on our toes. While we were in this muddle, a shell came in our midst, and killed thirteen of our men; Colonel Chester, the Adjutant-General, who was riding a white horse near me, was also killed by a fragment of this same shell. Then General Showers called out, "Deploy! form line! We shall all be killed standing here." We formed line, and rushed forward to the charge. The rebels had 24 guns in a crescent-shaped battery upon a raised mound. On we went, but before we could reach it a shell killed my right and left hand man, and the man behind me, and knocked me down. My pouch-belt was cut, and my Brown Bess twisted up to nothing—not that she was very much good at any time, for after firing eight or nine rounds she became fouled. We *had* to take that battery, so some of the crack shots went in front to pick off the men at the guns. Our regiment had been given gun-spikes the night before, and everyone felt determined that those guns should be spiked. When I fell down the regiment was still pushing on, and when I had a little recovered my senses—for I was rather confused—I got up and staggered on after them, but I soon fell down again. Then our regimental doctor came, and, after examining me, said I was not much hurt, but that the spent shell which had killed my comrades had struck me. Then they placed me on the top of an ammunition waggon, and I was seated upon something very hard, by Jove! and the driver was told to proceed at the double. The ground was exceedingly bad, and very broken, and every minute the waggon tilted at right angles; one wheel went up while the other went down, and I was first pitched up into the air, and then down again upon the round shot. Directly the driver stopped, I slipped off. "Won't you get up again?" he asked. "No," said I, "I'd sooner walk." So I went a little way on foot, until I

was taken up by an ambulance waggon. Then I saw Whitby galloping along like mad ; he was taking orders to the front, and was looking as merry as a grig. He drew up for one minute, and told me that our regiment and the 75th charged and took the guns, while soon after the 9th Lancers attacked the battery in the rear. Pandy had enough of it, and ran off. He then asked, "How is it you are not with your regiment?" "Because I was wounded by a spent shell," I answered. Then he said, "Fall to the rear, then, and come on in Eleanor's cart ; bring her to the front at once—we can meet on the Ridge at the Flagstaff," and off he went. The enemy are thoroughly beaten, and our men will keep them on the run all the way to the Ridge of Delhi.'

The brother and sister set off joyfully together, but very soon they were called upon to witness the awful reality of war. As they went down the fine level road, the whole of the ground was strewn with corpses, and English soldiers were throwing their dead in piles upon the backs of pad-elephants, to afterwards bury them in pits which had been dug for the purpose. As soon as they had reached the conquered batteries, at Budlee-ka-Serai, Eleanor perceived, among the innumerable dead lying there in heaps, many of their late regiment, the 38th N.I.—tall and handsome men from the province of Oude—and, with a shudder, she recognised the dead body of the youth who had protected her in her dire necessity—Partel Singh. She knew that he was not a traitor to them at heart, only he could not withstand the almost irresistible force of the contagious example of his countrymen.

Every step of the well-known road brought them near to Delhi.

'To-night,' cried Wake confidently, 'I shall see Louisa.'

'And Florence and Desmond also, I hope,' said his sister. 'That is a most blessed treasure of Ali Kareem's, for it has saved their lives, I really believe.'

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RIDGE OF DELHI.

ON the evening of the 11th of May, Brigadier Graves had been one of the last to turn his back upon the Flagstaff Tower, the scene of agonizing suspense and suffering ; and

now, accompanied by a victorious army, he was among the first to return to the cantonments of Delhi. The English had not regained the Ridge without some severe fighting, for, although the rebels had fled, panic-stricken, from Budlee-ka-Serai, they had made a stand at the Flagstaff Tower, and other places, only again to be defeated. The victors had captured twenty-six guns, thirteen of which were taken at Budlee-ka-Serai and the rest at the Ridge. Eleanor and her brother reached the rendezvous at the Flagstaff Tower, in which they saw, with a shudder, a ghastly memorial of the evening of the 11th of May, for the cart containing all that remained of the murdered officers of the 54th Regiment still stood there.

Whitby soon rejoined them, and, after a few words to his wife, turned to Wake, who was still seated in the bullock-cart, looking pale and wan. 'You have had a nasty knock,' he said, 'and, as a hospital is being arranged in the White House, you had better report yourself to the doctor of your regiment at once, for, my dear fellow, there seems little talk or fighting left in you.'

'It's all that detestable ammunition waggon,' answered Wake. 'I, who had pictured myself gallantly leading a charge like Prince Rupert, to find myself ignominiously knocked about like a shuttlecock upon round shot!'

Wake left, driving off in the bullock-cart, as they thought, to go into hospital; but he did not report himself to the doctor.

'I see,' Whitby said, 'that the mess-tent of the 200th is already erected there, on our left; the Hero of Ghazee-ooden-Nugger will extend his hospitality to you, Eleanor, I am sure. I hear that those fellows came in from Meerut like princes, with their cooks, their plate and china. Major Maunders will belie his portly presence and rubicund visage if he cannot produce some beer. I am so thirsty that I believe I would betray my country for a glass of pale ale!'

They went across to the mess-tent, where the camp-tables had suddenly risen, and cold meat, bread, butter, cheese, tea, and even more surprising luxuries, had appeared with a celerity that would have seemed magical, if it were not that the Asiatic servant has an aptitude for and a knowledge of camp-life quite unknown to the domestic of Western civilization. The officers of the regiment, consisting mostly

of old friends, greeted Mrs. Whitby warmly ; her cousin, Captain Coote, the paymaster, was there, also Pevensy and many others whom she had known intimately on the troopship in their long voyage of six months, sailing to India.

‘Here is champagne,’ said Maunders, bustling in. ‘Gentlemen, we must drink to “the thin red line!” How both officers and men charged that battery!—and to that we greatly owe the success of the day. Don’t talk of strategy and tactics ; there’s a something in the heart of every fellow, and, by Gad ! that it is which gains our battles. It has been a glorious victory ! Jan Fishan Khan, the Afghan, says another such a day will make him turn Christian !’

The champagne was opened and glasses passed round.

‘The Queen,’ said Maunders, after which toast they drank to the regiment.

War is a glorious game, and those who win can laugh, and they were all exhilarated with their successes, for in spite of the overpowering heat, the small Meerut force had in the short space of a week fought four pitched battles, and now found themselves close to the goal of all their aspirations—the revolted Imperial city. They hoped, with the light-heartedness of inexperience, to march triumphantly into Delhi the very next day. The victory of Budleeka-Serai, and the engagement on the Ridge, had struck such terror into the hearts of the people of Delhi, that most of them abandoned the sheltering walls of their stronghold ; but finding that the English did not follow up their successes, they soon returned. How grateful rest was to the invading force after such a week of marching and fighting !

Whitby, never a wealthy man, was wholly impoverished by the Mutiny. He had lost at least £1,000 worth of property by the burning of his bungalow and the loss of his horses and carriages ; public money seemed to be as scarce as private, and although he had received an advance of pay at Umballa, he had been obliged to expend it in the purchase of new chargers, and the bullock and cart which had conveyed his wife and his humble belongings to the Ridge. Therefore, a little old crockery, a few cups and spoons, one bazaar charpoy, and a few changes of linen, made up the sum of his worldly possessions. What added to the

Whitbys' destitution was the fact that so many other fugitives were in the same deplorable condition, which had caused the humblest necessities of life to command almost famine prices. Even that he had the luxury of a clean shirt was due to one of those obscure virtues which great crises bring forth. On the march to Alipore, as Whitby and his wife were sitting one evening in their tent, two privates of the 75th Regiment hastily entered with a bundle, which they placed under Whitby's bed.

'Sir,' said one of the men, 'we heard you had lost everything, and as our regiment has come fresh from the hills we have plenty, and as we didn't like you to go short, we have brought a few things which we hope you will honour us by accepting;' and before either acknowledgment or rejection could be offered by the astonished Whitby, his unknown benefactors ran away as if ashamed of themselves.

The Whitbys, however, were fortunate in having three good servants—the Sikh groom and the under-butler were with them, and the Christian ayah Maria.

While the officers of the 200th and their guests were lingering over their meal, the camp was rising in straight streets of tents. Suddenly they heard the clattering of horses' feet close to the mess-tent, and Hodson, riding a spirited chestnut, accompanied by his usual body-guard of troopers, drew rein at the door.

'That fellow again!' ejaculated the old Major under his breath.

'Major Maunders,' said Hodson, in the short authoritative way he had of talking, and which punctilious people were apt to resent—'Major Maunders, you are doubtless not aware that some men of your regiment are straggling into Delhi itself. They must be either drunk or looking for drink, and you had better see to this.' Then addressing Eleanor: 'Mrs. Whitby,' he said, 'I came to give you the earliest notice, that all the ladies and children who came with the troops from Umballa start for Meerut to-night at six, travelling upon pad-elephants. The road is perfectly quiet, and I expect we shall be keeping Pandy's hands so full here that he will have no time to molest your escort.'

Eleanor turned pale: she knew that she would have to part with her husband; still, to hear that the separation would take place so soon was very painful.

‘To-night?’ she said, with blanched lips.

‘A pad-elephant is not a very easy mode of travelling forty miles,’ said Whitby.

‘Some few ladies have their own carriages,’ replied Hodson. ‘Mrs. Blogg and her sister have requisitioned and obtained the Rajah of Raee’s carriage and four. Shall I try to obtain a seat for you with them, Mrs. Whitby?’

‘For Heaven’s sake don’t!’ answered Eleanor. ‘I should be “held responsible,” even if the enemy attacked us. I should much prefer the pad-elephant, although I know I shall fall off!’

‘But,’ said Coote, ‘I have a shigram (travelling waggon) here; you had better go in that. My wife will be glad to have you back in Meerut.’

‘I shall be delighted to see Etta again,’ said Eleanor, whose mind was relieved to find in those terrible times that she would have the companionship of an old friend with whom she shared the association of years.

‘The start will be made from the rear of the camp, from the racecourse,’ continued Hodson; ‘be sure you are punctual, for you had better go with the first lot, so as to escape the dust. You will be quite safe in the barracks of Meerut by to-morrow morning.’

Eleanor thought she would prefer insecurity with the society of her husband and brother to perfect safety without them; but she knew that objection was useless, and that the fighting men at the Ridge were anxious to be rid of the responsibility of the large convoy of women, children, and wounded which hampered their movements. Hodson then dashed off in his usual impetuous manner.

He was barely out of sight, the officers of the 200th had separated, and the Whitbys were walking back to their humble little tent, when all at once their ears were stunned by terrific shoutings mixed with uproarious laughter, among the tents.

‘Catch him! there he goes! hi! oh! hurrah! round by the right, don’t let him get away! stop him!’

Suddenly a little old man appeared; he had a white beard, and, despite his years, was leaping nimbly over the numerous tent-ropes of the encampment, followed by an excited mob of young soldiers. The man who was being pursued, on seeing Whitby, threw himself at his feet, and

embracing his knees, cried, 'Justice! justice, Sahib! save me! save me!' and he began volubly to explain that he was not a rebel, but a loyal camp-follower.

'What does this mean, my men?' said Whitby to the noisy crew, who looked ill-pleased on seeing their prey escaping them.

'Please, sir,' said one of the 200th, 'he is a d—— Pandy, and we was going to hang him!'

Whitby saw that these brutal lads were half intoxicated with liquor, and still more with the wild excitement of battle and the desire for revenge. To reason with them was useless, but just then he saw a pariah dog running howling down the street of the camp; 'All right,' he said to the soldiers, 'but do you see that dog? Catch him, and hang him first'; and away went the yelling mob helter-skelter after the luckless cur, whom, after a stern chase, they caught and triumphantly suspended to the nearest tree. 'What a horrid trade is war!' said Whitby to his wife. 'Men call it glory and honour, but it is one of the most frightful and inexplicable realities of life. It ought to be done away with, but how? for brute force can only be checked by stronger physical power. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he divideth his spoils."'

As Mrs. Whitby waited for the equipage which was to take her to Meerut, she witnessed another curious scene. Some native troops were surrounding Hodson, who was calmly seated upon his charger, looking more like a statue than a living being. The soldiers were strong-looking men, wearing blue turbans, and they rent the air with shouts of 'Burra Lerai Wallah!' (great in battle), while with tears streaming down their faces they seized Hodson's bridle, dress, hands and feet, and prostrated themselves before his horse.

Captain Pevensy, who was near, told Eleanor: 'It is only the Guides come in from the Punjaub, and they are delighted to see their old officer again, that is all! The Guides have made a wonderful march, coming from the Punjaub, about 580 miles, in twenty days; they were just too late for Budlee-ka-Serai.'

Whitby spent that day with the Brigadier, giving orders and making arrangements; he could not therefore return

until nearly six o'clock to take leave of his wife, whom he found standing outside their tent, anxiously looking for him. 'I am late,' he said, 'but really could not come before. Where is the shigram?'

'It has not come yet,' answered Eleanor. 'Good gracious! what was that?'

'Oh! nothing,' said Whitby, with a satirical laugh; 'nothing—only a shot.' Then he heard voices in the near distance, and the words, soon fatally familiar to them, 'Come on, my brother! Make haste, my brother!' More shots quickly followed the pioneer visitor.

'We are attacked,' said Whitby. 'I must return to the Brigadier; go to the rear and join the convoy—they will be able to find a place for you somewhere.'

They gave each other one long, heartfelt kiss, and then parted. Eleanor watched her husband as long as he was in sight; she felt almost too stunned and paralyzed to move. 'Come, madam,' said the ayah, who stood near, with the small bundle which held all their worldly goods. The two women hurried down the main street of the camp, on every side of which men were rushing to seize their arms, while drums beat and trumpets sounded. Eleanor and her maid stepped aside as some guns came thundering past, followed by a detachment of the Guides, with the ubiquitous Hodson and his handful of troopers, now far too busy to notice Eleanor's scared face. The mistress and servant at last reached a place beyond the tents, a broad, flat plain, the old race-course, bordered by some fine trees growing along the banks of a canal; but there was no sign of carriages, elephants, nor escort. 'We have missed them,' said Mrs. Whitby, 'and to tell you the truth I am not at all sorry. We must find our way back as quickly as we can.' After wandering about for some time, for they repeatedly lost themselves in the darkness which had suddenly fallen, they could hear the roar of the onslaught going on in front of the Ridge. At last the large white mess-tent of the 200th loomed upon them out of the obscurity—a welcome landmark. 'We are home again!' exclaimed the ayah joyfully. Eleanor laughed at the woman's idea of a home, but she was delighted to perceive the tall figure of her husband, who approached as they neared the tent. 'Nellie,' he said, 'you back again! how is this?'

'They must have started,' she answered, 'for we could not find them.'

'You will have to wait for the next convoy then; however, my darling, I am more pleased than words can express to have you with me a little longer.'

'If they would only let me stop in camp,' said his wife.

'That must depend upon Barnard. You are only a camp-follower, Nell, and must either obey orders or be tried by drumhead court-martial.'

'Then I will obey orders,' she laughed. 'Besides, you know I have an innate respect for lawfully constituted authority.'

'We've just had a brush with the enemy, and have driven Pandy back. I dare say that the generous 200th would give you some supper if we went to them.'

The officers of the 200th raised a hearty cheer at Eleanor's unexpected re-appearance in their mess-tent, and overwhelmed her and her husband with their hospitalities. The term 'brother-officer' in many instances is more than a mere name, and it is indisputable that the fact of serving in the same corps begets lifelong friendships, stronger even than the tie of kindred.

'The stragglers,' said Maunders, 'of whom that busybody Hodson was complaining, have reduced themselves to Wake, who, instead of going to hospital, actually got into the City of Delhi, and Miles O'Connor, who had been drinking—as usual. Wake declares he saw Burke and Carew in Doobghur's house in Delhi, also that the inhabitants and troops were flying, panic-stricken; so if we march in, the town is ours.'

The fact that Eleanor was still in camp was reported to Sir H. Barnard by Hodson, who also stated her wish to remain.

'Poor lady! poor lady!' said the kind old man; 'she must stop for the present, until the next convoy of wounded starts for Umballa.'

Thus on sufferance Mrs. Whitby stayed with her husband, sharing with him the hospitality of the 200th.

The sun rose the next morning, the 10th June, in exquisite beauty and splendour, and filled the clear gray sky with orange and pink light.

'Whitby!' shouted a voice at the door of the tent, and Whitby rushed out half dressed, with his sword in one hand

and a revolver in the other—the usual night companions of men in those times. The speaker was the ever-vigilant Hodson.

‘The mutineers are coming up again; ride forward and warn Reid to turn out his plucky little Goorkhas. Light and Tombs have gone to the front; if their guns don’t make the rascals turn tail, what will?’

By this time Eleanor had appeared, looking as white as a sheet, while the officers and men of the 200th were rushing out of their tents.

‘You will take care of Richard,’ she said, with a woman’s want of logic when her feelings are concerned, ‘and bring him safe back to me, Major Maunders?’

‘That I will,’ laughed he; ‘or, rather, he will take care of me, for there is no man in the army I would sooner have at my back in a scrimmage than Whitby!’

For Whitby to call for his horse, to dress, and buckle on his sword, only occupied a few minutes. One hurried farewell kiss to his wife, and he was off.

Mrs. Whitby soon after went out on an elevated position known as the General’s Mound, from which she could see that the whole camp was in motion. The English troops were moving over the hilly country, until lost to sight among the green trees of a thick grove which surrounded Metcalfe House. Then at length the far-away booming of guns commenced, which was the first intimation to many in the camp that something of importance was taking place.

The mound, where Eleanor was at first the only watcher, soon became so crowded that there was barely standing-room on it, for all the officers not engaged in the fighting had hastened there, as it was a good look-out.

The English were that day perfectly certain of success. They looked upon a day of battle as a day of triumph, and so sure were they of victory that they hardly gave a thought to the sad certainty that some of those who had gone forth that morning would never return. Such was the public opinion of the minute, and this confidence cheered and exhilarated Eleanor’s heart.

‘The heavy firing has ceased; that is good for us, you may be sure,’ remarked Captain Coote to Eleanor. It was now twelve o’clock, the troops had started at sunrise. It was a more scorching day than ever; the cruel Eastern sun

beat down on burning-hot rocks and dried-up vegetation, and on the white, dusty roads. The sky in its intense cloudless blue was a pitiless expanse of glittering light.

‘Come back to the tent, madam,’ cried the ayah, who had followed her. ‘It is madness to stay here in this heat. It will give you a brain fever.’

Eleanor followed her domestic down the steep narrow path unresistingly, feeling that it was unwise to expose herself needlessly. They were walking towards their tent when Whitby’s groom rushed towards them, breathless, and almost speechless.

‘The English are retreating!’ he gasped out.

‘And your master?’ asked Eleanor, turning so sick and faint that she supported herself against the ayah’s stronger and steadier arm.

‘The Sahib is wounded,’ answered the man. ‘I was in the rear of the fight, holding his second horse, and heard that he had fallen.’

The troops were returning. First they saw a squadron of the Guides come galloping in, their horses covered with foam and dust. Very shortly some guns passed, the limbers crowded with men, principally wounded; then a handful of British infantry, still retaining a fair semblance of order, although the men were suffering from intense thirst and complete exhaustion from exposure to the burning sun, and could hardly drag themselves along. Then a confused mass of parts of regiments, Hindostanees and Englishmen, mingled together without much attempt at order, and some litters containing wounded. The wounded were taken from the guns and laid in rows on the ground. Eleanor and her ayah, Maria, with pale and stricken faces, watched each body of travel and war-stained men as they defiled past, searching in vain amongst the throng of unknown faces for the one countenance which Eleanor loved above all on earth.

And now her heart beat quickly and then seemed to stop, as thundering by came the General and his staff, thinned to half the number of those who had started in such proud array that morning, but Whitby was no longer among them.

‘He is in the rear—he would be the last man to leave—he must be somewhere else,’ faltered Eleanor.

‘How dreadfully you are trembling, madam!’ said the pitying ayah.

And then, joyfully recognised by Eleanor's eager eyes, the 200th came in.

Eleanor hastened forward to speak to Maunders.

'I cannot see Richard,' she said, 'perhaps on account of the confusion. But you have brought him back—you said you would.'

'I tried to save him,' answered Maunders, in short, quick accents, the tears standing in his eyes. 'I heard he was wounded, and went in search of him. Our troops had begun to retire; at length I saw Whitby lying on the ground, unhorsed and wounded.' He did not dare to tell the agonised wife standing there that he was cut to pieces!

'By this time the troops had gone back,' he continued, 'and the enemy were close at hand. I wished to bring some men back to carry him away; but Whitby would not allow it. I begged him to do so. At last he said, "Maunders, you have left your post, go and rejoin your regiment; your men are without a commandant, you are wanted there, you can be of no use here." I left him very reluctantly, but there was no time for remonstrance, for the enemy swept up, and I only escaped out of their hands by being well mounted. As it was, a trooper attacked me, and only left me when I had rejoined my men. The Guides protected our rear; but we were so hotly pressed, that every now and then the rebels cut down a man from our ranks. They are five to one against us, you know.'

'But he was only wounded,' said Eleanor, who was utterly numbed with despair. 'Could he not be saved even now?'

'He is badly wounded, and it is three miles off,' said Maunders, who dared not add that those barbarians always killed the wounded.

Wake now came running up. 'What is this about Richard?' he asked. 'Is it true that he is left behind wounded? If they will allow it, and any men will join me, I will head a rescue.'

'Yes,' cried his sister excitedly, 'save him!'

'It is impossible, I fear,' said Maunders. 'It would never be allowed, and, besides, how could a handful of men cut their way through thousands? Every man is a great loss to us, and we have been terribly weakened by to-day's fighting. I fear Barnard will never permit it.'

'If Colonel Rawley had lived he would never have allowed Richard to be sacrificed,' said Eleanor, with that bitter looking to second causes which adds such poignancy to our misfortunes. 'I do not ask that more lives should be risked. I will go alone and look for him! He may be yet alive.'

'Eleanor,' said Wake, 'that is madness. 'Try to calm yourself.'

'I cannot. You know how we loved each other. Oh, if you could only save him!'

'This is not civilized war,' interrupted Maunders; 'we must count our wounded among the dead. Poor Whitby! the welfare of our troops was always his first and last thought; we could ill afford to lose an officer like him. I must go to my post; but I will come back again to you, Mrs. Whitby.'

Eleanor hardly heard his words.

'Do come to the tent, madam,' pleaded Maria.

'No; oh no!' answered her mistress wildly. 'I could not bear to see that place without him. It would be agony. I will not believe that he is dead; they cannot have killed him. I will watch here in case he comes; at least let me see the spot where my eyes last rested on him.'

They were in the midst of confusion and turmoil; litters passing with wounded men, bodies of soldiers marching; on every side hurried preparations for defending the Ridge in case of a further attack. The passing soldiers looked with pitying dismay at the dazed, grief-stricken Eleanor, who was scarcely conscious of their presence.

'Let us go up there,' she said at last; 'we shall be able to see the road, and there is a shady tree to sit under.'

When they reached the spot, they found it dominated the city. Men still passed them hurrying to their posts; guns were being loaded, and batteries were being made. The burning fiery sun beat down on them, while 'the busy hum of men' rose from the city below. They could hear in the camp strong English voices calling to each other, and the strokes of the pickaxes as they hurriedly threw up the earthwork of the defence. They could see troops moving; a squadron of Englishmen, sent to hold an important post. Eleanor watched all these preparations with lack-lustre eyes, tearless and silent, in the waywardness of grief and despair; and again, when her attendant begged her to return to the

camp, she replied, 'I cannot! let me remain here in the open air. I have neither hope nor interest in anything, and I never shall have again.'

Night fell; the night which falls so suddenly in the tropics, and the attack recommenced with a fierce and long cannonade, and a perfect storm of musket-shots. The shot and shell fell around her like hail, but Eleanor heeded them not; as in a trance she heard the sinister whizzing shriek of the shell as it travelled through the air, and the heavy thud with which it struck the ground. Then some tents caught fire and cast a lurid glare upon the scene; and then arose the sound of men marching, voices and outcries in the darkness, and high above all rang the war-cry of the assailants, 'Allah! Allah!' and still she watched and waited.

'Dearest Eleanor!' said Wake's voice, 'Hodson beseeches you to come in; you are under fire here. The tent of the 200th is one of the least exposed places; let me take you there.'

'The shot and shell will not kill me,' she answered bitterly; 'I long for death. But he is not dead. Oh! tell me that he will return; he was only wounded.'

'Vain hope, my poor sister; those cruel human tigers always kill the wounded.'

'I saw a soldier's wife at Budlee-ka-Serai,' she continued in an unnaturally calm manner; 'she opened the curtains of a litter, and there she found her dead. I almost envy her now; if I only knew the worst, if I only had his body.'

New sorrows speak; old sorrows are dumb.

'It cannot be true,' she said to her brother. My husband, who left me only this morning so strong and well, how shall I live without him? I feel as if I should go mad when I think of Richard lying graveless among the unburied dead; food for the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air. Perhaps he is suffering pain and thirst, or perhaps some marauder has given him a *coup de grace*.'

While she spoke, a firmament of glittering brightness, like the eyes of Divine Mercy, looked down on the sorrow-stricken woman.

'I am very miserable now,' she continued, 'but still I have been blessed; if it were all to happen over again, and yet end so fatally, I would still do as I have done. I have had my happiness, for I have been loved by him, and I have

been his wife. Nothing can take from me the recollection of so much joy. I would sooner have the memory of my glorious dead, than any living love.'

Wake was looking moodily from the Ridge, down upon the great walled city.

'If they would only storm the place,' he sighed. 'Delay may be fatal to *them*.' He was thinking of the English hostages in Doobghur's hand.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHITBY'S STORY.

NEVER did cloud of war break over a fairer city than Delhi. In the far delusive distance—from the Ridge—it resembled a well-wooded and undulating English landscape, a land of smiling verdure with leafy masses of trees. At the base of the heights ran the dancing blue waters of the river Jumna, and beyond this rose the lordly walled town, towered and bastioned, like some grim mediæval fortress; a city, like Constantinople or Cairo, of innumerable domes, massive in form, and of slim minarets springing up to the sky.

The historic Ridge itself was a curious seat of war, being a rocky eminence running parallel to the city, but at an elevation of some eighty feet above it; and behind this natural wall the English tents were pitched, with order and precision, on the old level parade-ground of the cantonments. The ruined villas and gardens of the English officers lay to the right, while the rear of the camp was protected by deep canals, usually dry in the summer season, but that year full of water, in consequence of exceptionally heavy rains; and this ample supply of the first necessary of life was invaluable to the attacking force. The left of the English position was more or less naturally protected by the impracticable character of the ground and the river Jumna, and was further defended by an advanced post, known as Metcalfe House. The right was the scene of the heaviest fighting, because the rebels could come up to attack the English under cover of the houses and gardens in the native quarter outside the walls of Delhi. These suburbs and gardens ran up to the English defences, one of which was Hindoo Rao's house—a lofty, well-built modern residence—

the Mosque Picket—a strong Pathan ruin, with walls six feet thick; while the Observatory Picket, the Mound Picket, and the Flagstaff Picket completed the list of the English outposts. Against these points multitudes of the rebel soldiery threw themselves again and again, and were driven back in hand-to-hand encounters; for the fighting was not that of the present day—a combat of magnificent distances—but more a series of personal encounters, such as Homer describes between Greeks and Trojans, in which the strong arm and the heavy sword told, and in which the courage of every individual brave heart and indomitable spirit made itself felt. The English on the Ridge never numbered more than 4,000, while inside the revolted city at one time there were 65,000 fighting men, armed and trained by us, possessing a vast collection of cannon and ammunition. The rebel soldiery were better gunners than the English, as much of the artillery of the latter was composed of raw levies, recruited at random in the Purjaub.

On the night of the 10th June the turbaned foe had been beaten back three times from the heroically-defended heights of the Ridge, and they were thus foiled time after time, and day after day.

The first streak of dawn had appeared on the morning of the 11th; both besiegers and besieged were sleeping from utter exhaustion, and still Eleanor Whitby remained a solitary watcher on the crest of the hill; for vaguely in her misery her eyes sought the spot where she had last seen her husband. She stood and looked towards the city reposing below her; she was gazing sadly on the trees near Metcalfe House, now all blue and misty in the early morning: it was there, she feared, her husband lay among the unburied dead; while near at hand a broad-shouldered English sentry paced up and down with heavy tread, and as, in these troubled times, double sentries were always placed, his companion soldier lay sleeping on the ground.

‘You are in an exposed position, ma’am,’ said the soldier; ‘the rebels may aim at you from the walls, as your white dress will attract their notice.’

‘Thank you. I will leave directly,’ she answered; and yet she still lingered: some extraordinary presentiment chained her to the spot.

All that night shot and shell, thick as hail, had fallen

around her, leaving her unarmed, while many a man to whom life was sweet had perished, or, frightfully wounded, lived, but in agony. Eleanor's sad eyes still sought the far distance, little heeding what was passing near, when she was startled by the sharp report of a musket close at hand, and then saw that the sentry had discharged his weapon, and was reloading.

'What are you firing at?' she asked.

'There, ma'am,' he said, pointing to a single horseman below, who was slowly approaching the beleaguered camp.

'Don't fire!' she exclaimed; 'for Heaven's sake don't fire! It is my husband, Captain Whitby!'

The sharp report of the musket had, by this time, brought out the picket, and in a second a dozen guns were pointed and discharged at the solitary rider.

Eleanor hid her face in her hands, and hardly knew if an hour or a minute had passed when she again opened her eyes. The balls had raked the ground around, but the horseman continued to advance at his intensely slow pace.

'Don't fire again!' Eleanor implored; 'it is my husband—it is Captain Whitby!'

'In that rig-out, ma'am? He does not look like an Englishman.'

The mysterious rider was clad in an Eastern dress, with a green turban on his head, but Eleanor's eyes, keen from love, had at once recognised the tall figure of her husband, and knew also that the horse was Whitby's handsome gray Arab charger.

The horseman drew nearer and nearer; it was Whitby—haggard, wan, covered with blood and dust, speechless from exhaustion, and nearly senseless, with death gazing from his lustreless eyes; he had evidently been brought back more by the instinct of his horse than by his own will. Had a man risen from the dead, there could scarcely have been greater astonishment than the soldiers felt at the sight of that ghastly figure, looking the more unreal and fantastic from the magnificent but disordered native dress. They wondered by what miracle he had been saved from the jaws of death!

'We are right glad to see him back, ma'am; he was always a good friend to us soldiers,' said the corporal of the guard; and then, with great gentleness, though not without

difficulty, the usually rough men took Whitby off his horse ; but he had fainted away without recognising his wife, or speaking a word.

He was then laid in a litter, and borne on men's shoulders to his tent, where he was placed on his camp-bed. His eyes were still closed, while his dark hair, streaked with gray, fell all disordered over his white forehead ; and his wife watched his countenance with a wordless anxiety that dared not despair, yet still less dared to hope.

The camp was now just awakening—if such a term could be applied to those who had but little time for sleep.

The news ran through the neighbouring tents that Whitby had returned 'brought in by natives,' said the soldiers of the 200th, with the usual love of the vulgar for inventing, and believing the untrue. The men and officers of Maunders' regiment crowded into and all around the Whitbys' tent, which was far too small to admit the wondering throng. An army-surgeon from the hospital soon appeared on the scene, while Maunders, Wake, and Captain Coote stood near the cot of the wounded man. Among the people who rejoiced and marvelled at Whitby's re-appearance was Hodson, whose tall figure could be seen among the sympathising spectators. He had been told that Whitby was killed.

'I assure you, Mrs. Whitby,' he said to Eleanor, 'if I had had the least idea he was only wounded, I would have brought him in myself, with or without orders.' Eleanor was persuaded that he, the bravest among those who were all brave, would never have left a comrade as Maunders had done. When Whitby's wounds were examined it was found that a bullet had shattered his knee, while a sabre-cut had rendered his sword-arm useless.

'Men get over wonderful wounds, and he has a good constitution,' said the doctor cheerfully, in answer to Eleanor's anxious inquiries ; but before the medico left the tent, he said privately to Maunders, 'He may recover from his wounds, but I fear he will be crippled for life.'

'You must get Whitby moved into my tent, which is large and airy ; this small affair will never do. I can double up with Coote,' said Major Maunders.

However, all that skill and love could do was done, and Eleanor watched at the side of her husband's low cot all the

long weary day, after he had been moved into Maunders' comfortable and well-equipped tent. How happy, despite all its sadness, was that watch to her as she nursed her loved one in silence, listening to his laboured breathing, fearing to move or speak lest he might wake. The whole of that day Whitby lay hovering between life and death, still insensible, and unconscious of those who with unremitting care were tending him. He never uttered an articulate sound, although in some mysterious way it seemed to soothe the wandering of the sick man's brain when his wife ministered or spoke to him. As he lay on his bed seemingly lost to use and life, around him echoed the uproar of shot and shell, the din of battle, and the outcries of war.

Late that night Eleanor saw with joy that her husband's eyes were turned towards her with a look of loving recognition, and as she delightedly bent over him, he faintly whispered one word—'Darling;' and from that hour he mended, in spite of the able doctor's well-grounded although ominous prognostics—he ought to have died, they said, instead of which he slowly grew better. Both Whitby's wife and friends in the camp considered his return as miraculous, and felt intensely curious to learn how it came about. He at last told them the circumstances of his escape. He had been saved by his horse!

'The Guides had charged,' said Whitby, 'and I saw poor young Battye fall wounded, when a shot struck my knee; and just then three "Ghazees" (religious enthusiasts), wearing green turbans, dashed up with astonishing rapidity. They had small round bucklers on their left arms, and in their right hands whirled and gleamed their shining scimitars. I was soon unhorsed—for my wounded knee prevented my holding on—but not before I had shot down one of the "Ghazees." After I fell, for a while I lay stunned; when I came to myself I tried to rise, but could not stir, and, of course, my horse, Ariel, was gone. I saw that the English troops had not quite moved out of sight; there was hand-to-hand fighting going on, and something in one part of the field which looked like *saute qui peut*. Then Maunders came to my help, but I saw that unless the infantry formed quickly the route might become general; they succeeded in rallying the 200th, which, although composed of raw troops, was splendid material. It was then

not the time to think of me, but to prevent a reverse. I do not lay much credit to myself for greatness of mind, as there were no men available to take me away, and some wounded who had been put into litters had been abandoned by the native bearers, who had run off. As night came on, our force fell back in order; but in the confusion, I suppose, I was forgotten until it was too late. I must say I wondered where Hodson was; for I think I know him well enough to feel certain that had he heard I was wounded he would have moved heaven and earth to have got me in somehow.

‘In the night some native marauders came, who robbed and killed the wounded with a seeming impartiality as to whether it was friend or foe. I heard the groans of various poor wretches who were thus hastened out of the world, and expected every minute my turn would come next. The dead Ghazee was lying close to me; I fancy he was a man of superior rank, as he was richly dressed. Near us both was a thick camel-thorn bush, whose branches swept the ground, and this concealed us from the thieves. I was frightfully thirsty, and in horrible pain, and could see in the distance men with lights moving hither and thither, either searching for their dead, or robbing corpses, but it fortunately happened that none came near me. At the earliest streak of dawn, I perceived a riderless horse with an English military saddle wandering about, and I knew at once it was Ariel. Nellie, both you and I have made such a pet of him, giving him sugar and bread, that he would follow us anywhere when called. “Ariel! Ariel!” I shouted with all my strength, and the noble brute knew my voice and his name; he pricked up his ears, whinnied, and came slowly to me, putting his head down and smelling me, with a little joyful neigh of recognition. I believe—with the wonderful instinct of a thoroughbred Arab, which amounts almost to reason—that Ariel understood my difficulty and danger. Good, willing beast! he stood quite still while I got on his back with an immense effort: the agony was so great that in ordinary times I do not think I could have moved; but I was electrified by the horrors of the sounds and sights of that night, and besides, Nell, I thought of you; I knew how heart-broken you would be if I did not return. All my hope of life now depended on Ariel, who, although usually so spirited, walked gently the whole of the way, as if he knew

my suffering, which indeed was so great that if I had had another half-mile farther to go I never could have sat my charger; as it was, I nearly lost my life at the hands of the picket, for I could not call out. Before I tried to mount my horse, I remembered that I should have to pass through a native village, and so managed somehow to put on the turban and cloak of the Ghazee, which, it seems, effectually disguised me.'

'We will never part with that dear, noble horse; I shall be grateful to Ariel as long as I live!' cried Eleanor.

There were occasional lulls in the fighting; daily life went on somehow—people ate and drank, laughed and slept, though the food was scarcely eatable from the millions of flies which infested the camp; drink, except in the matter of water, was hard to get; beer and spirits so scarce that they were sold at famine prices. The English on the Ridge managed to sleep in spite of the ceaseless roar of artillery; still, unbroken rest was rare, with constant night attacks and stifling heat. But never were hardships met more heroically. The Delhi Field Force as a body were young, and loved a stirring life; moreover, the excitement was tremendous. A gloomy countenance was rare, and railed at with scorn, and a croaker was voted a bore; come what would, they would meet it pluckily, and the gallant youths—for they were mostly boys—died for their country with a smile on their faces.

It was the 12th of June: the English were turned out early that morning by an attack on their outposts and position generally by the rebel army. A sharp fight ensued, which lasted some four hours. The enemy came on very boldly, and had got close to them under cover of the trees and gardens before they were seen; however, the troops, including the 200th, the Guides, and Hodson's Horse, were quickly on the spot, and drove the foe back from the vicinity; they were then followed up and were most heartily thrashed. It was estimated that the rebel loss, in killed alone, amounted to four hundred, while the English loss was comparatively trifling.

The 200th Regiment had been nearly continually engaged, so that Eleanor had not even seen her brother or any of the officers for some days. Wake came to the tent occupied by the Whitbys, and his sister's servants hastily prepared him

some tea. 'No, Nell,' he said, in answer to her inquiries, and laughing joyously, 'I am as right as ninepence, and as fit as a flea, so don't kill me in imagination every time I go fighting. This has been a glorious day; we drove the rebels from the Ridge, and then followed them up, nearly to the walls of the city. They have never yet been so punished as to-day. It was very creditable to us; our regiment and my company behaved splendidly. Have you heard, Nell, that I have recovered my commission? I received an official letter from the Adjutant-General's office two days ago, posting me to the 200th, so I am doing poor Burke's work.'

'I am glad! I am delighted!' answered his sister.

'The fact is, old Maunders stirred them up at headquarters, as we are so short of officers. The officers of my regiment think I was quite right to take that treasure from a nigger; and if not, these are not the times to listen to the quibbling of rogues and lawyers. "He should take who has the power, and he should keep who can!"'

'I am glad about your commission! But is it true that you got into Delhi on the evening of the 9th, when we reached the Ridge? And did you really see Burke, Carew, and Florence? I have been so anxious about that; but one fight has followed another so quickly that I have seen no one whom I could ask.'

'Yes, by Heaven, I really got into Delhi that evening, and I saw Louisa, but neither Burke, Florence, nor Carew, although she told me they were safe and well.'

'You got in! you saw her! Tell me all about it!'

'When I left you on the Ridge, I intended going into hospital, but on my way I fell in with Miles O'Connor—mad drunk. He was standing in the road, his drawn bayonet in his hand, shouting: "It's meself's the bhoy to take the city of Del-*hi*, and cut off the King's head entoirely. I, Miles O'Connor, at your sarvice, yer onner." Then he began running down the road leading to the Cashmere Gate; he was leading an imaginary charge, brandishing his weapon, and roaring: "Charge! we will take the city, me bhoys; hooray! give them the cold stale, me lads, and get a goold chain, or a wooden leg." I followed the fellow at first, not caring to leave a comrade in danger, for I knew the man, and liked him; he was such an amusing fellow when sober, though a regular devil when drunk. At

the pace he was going we soon found ourselves outside the city gates, and the appearance of Miles, yelling, swearing, screaming, and flourishing his weapon wildly, had the greatest effect on the civilian inhabitants of the bazaar outside the city walls. They were never very brave, and they fled in every direction panic-stricken. I saw the great arched town-gate before me. Miles ran across the bridge, and I followed, no one opposing us, for no soldiers seemed to be about. The fact is, I fancy the Delhians took us for the advance-guard of the invading English. Believe me, I did not start on the heroic enterprise of taking Delhi single-handed, as the valiant Miles had done, but finding everyone too terrified to bar our way, I thought I would go on to Doobghur's house, which I knew was a great straggling palace, standing in a garden near the Cashmere Gate. After we had got into the city, we went into a narrow by-street, and found it all deserted and silent, not a human being in sight. The door of Doobghur's house being open, I entered, but Miles fell down on the threshold, and there he lay, making the whole neighbourhood resound with his oaths and curses, so that I do not wonder the natives were alarmed, for his coarse voice, thick from drink, and the horrible things he said, sounded loathsome, even to my not over-fastidious ears. I found in the court of the house a crowd of servants, but my sudden appearance in their midst, with a drawn sword in my hand, which I had picked up, was too much for these valiant retainers, and to a man they rushed out by a back way. I then saw an open door at the foot of a narrow flight of steps, and the impulse seized me to go up these stairs, which were the steepest I have ever seen in my life. I found the house was built round a square, and had overhanging verandas like an old inn. No one barred my progress, so I wandered through deserted rooms, a few furnished with the English luxuries of chairs and tables, the rest mostly bare; then I went up more stairs, and into more rooms, for the palace was large, in parts of three stories, and most irregularly built. I saw no one, and yet I heard smothered cries and the rustling of garments, and I at length reached the flat-terraced roof of the house, and called out: "Louisa! Louisa!" I fancied, from the decorations and the women's clothes and jewels lying about, that I had reached the zenana of the establish-

ment. At length Louisa appeared. I felt as if I had called a spirit, and it had answered my summons; she looked well and cheerful, but very pale and much changed; but what made her the less recognisable was that she was dressed in a magnificent native dress, her fair hair hardly showed—it was drawn off her face, and a white and gold veil fell in graceful draperies about her. Her robe was of purple brocade, richly embroidered, and she wore golden shoes without stockings, while her arms and neck were covered with jewels.

“Louisa!” I cried, “can it be you?”

“She looked at me utterly terrified.

“Have the English taken the city?” she asked; for we could both hear Miles’s frantic yells at the gate.

“No!” I answered, “I am alone, or nearly so. Come with me; we will escape together.”

“I dare not!” she answered, trembling in every limb; “I will not come! We shall be murdered in the streets; besides, we could not even leave the house without being opposed, and it is folly!”

“I tried to persuade her, but she would not listen. She told me afterwards that Burke and Carew were hidden somewhere in Delhi, and that Florence and she were to be soon sent, with the women of the zenana out of the city.

“At this moment a handsome young native rushed on to the terrace; he was a very small man, no darker than a Spaniard, with regular features and dark eyes. He spoke in the native tongue to Louisa, and, from the little I could comprehend, I believe he was Doobghur himself.

“Just then we heard a number of people ascending the stairs. Louisa turned to me.

““They are the King’s Guard,” she said in English; “they will kill you! you must escape! I cannot save you—a Christian—although I am in no danger myself.”

“There was a rope hanging from the side of the wall, for the purpose of drawing up a large copper bucket of water. She always had presence of mind.

““Quick! quick!” Louisa said; “get down by that rope,” pointing to it. “Go! go! I am safe!” she added, and then ran rapidly back into the house.

“I got away, partly by the rope and afterwards by the waterpipes, and reached the basement, which was still

deserted ; just as I dropped over the wall a party of armed men rushed upon the roof. Miles O'Connor was still in the street, now partially sobered, and, as it was dark, we managed to get out of the city unmolested, very likely being taken for Sepoys, for we both had lost our hats in our adventures. Once outside the walls, I led Miles through the groves and gardens until we regained the Ridge.'

'What an extraordinary tale !' said Eleanor. 'So you have seen Louisa living in a Mahomedan zenana !'

'Poor Louisa !' rejoined Wake ; 'we last met on the 10th May, just a month ago ; and what have we all gone through since ! On that occasion she was so sweet and gentle, and told me that we should leave India together, and that she really loved me better than Carew. It has been such happiness to me to remember how nice she was at that last meeting. Believe me, she never really cared for Carew. She is not like you, Eleanor, I admit ; she is not brave and truthful, nor has she your keen sense of right and wrong, and scorn of double-dealing. She is not strong-minded, but she has grace, tact, and mother-wit, and, at times, amiability and kindness ; but what does it matter what she is or what she is not ! I am glad I have seen her again, for I love her madly and would die for her ! Do you know that Greathead, Chesney, Maunsell, and Hodson have sent in to General Barnard a scheme for the attack of Delhi, and the assault will take place to-morrow, the 13th June ? No sooner are we inside the city walls than men will be told off for their rescue. It is to be kept a secret that there are Englishwomen in Doobghur's house. Louisa said that their safety depended upon it, for the bloodthirsty fanaticism of the Mahomedans is so strong, that if it was known that any English, or Christians, were hidden in any place, the mob—to say nothing of the mutineers—would undoubtedly rush into the palace and kill them ; so we must be cautious. I shall lead the rescuing party, but we have to wait more than eight hours ! How shall I live through such an eternity of suspense ?'

That night, for once, the enemy did not attack, and there was time for a comfortable dinner at the mess of the 200th, where Wake was admitted for the first time as an officer. That evening the talk of the mess-table turned upon the fact that the discussion with General Barnard of ways and means for taking Delhi was then going on, though as yet no orders

had been received. But it was the general opinion in the mess tent that the attacking force was to assemble between the hours of one and two o'clock that night, and, under cover of the darkness, proceed noiselessly to the Caubul and Lahore gates, which were believed to be open, but, if found closed, were to be blown up with powder-bags. It was supposed that all the details had been arranged and plans prepared, but the troops had still to be told off for the attacking columns. It was known that Maunsell, of the Engineers, and Hodson were to conduct one explosion party, and Greathead and McNeill the other.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HARD FIGHTING.

ALL that night Eleanor heard the subdued noise of preparation, and then the troops moved stealthily away in the darkness to take the town by assault. It was a very anxious time ; if they failed it was fatal, for the English had no reserve on which to retire ; moreover, if the enemy came up and attacked the camp, there was only a weak guard of natives to rely upon ; therefore the Whitbys listened, with strained nerves, to hear when the firing should commence, and for the now accustomed roar of battle ; however, not a sound broke the stillness of the night. Several hours passed, and then they heard guns approaching, the tramp of cavalry, and the steady tread of infantry, but all indicating the advance of a force in perfect order. It was just dawn ; what could it mean ? Was it the enemy ? Mrs. Whitby and her servants rushed out to know the worst, and saw that the small English army had returned to camp. The command was given for the men to fall out, and soon after her brother rushed into the tent. He was as white as death, and his eyes sparkled with rage as he threw his cap on the floor with a gesture of fury, and then trampled upon it.

'Why are you back so soon ?' asked Mrs. Whitby ; 'you can never have taken Delhi ?'

'Taken Delhi !' he answered passionately ; 'it is maddening, when all I care for in life is at stake. We were recalled, although we were under the very city walls ; I absolutely saw the lights burning in Doobghur's house, and yet had to turn my back on the town. Oh, Eleanor !'

‘But why have you returned?’ asked Whitby.

‘It is the fault of Brigadier Graves; “a mistake of orders!”—Mistake, indeed! the fellow never meant to turn up. It appears that about eleven o’clock last night instructions were received that the English soldiers on picket at the Flagstaff were to be moved off for special duty without being relieved, with a vague hint that a night assault was in contemplation. Graves saw them putting a native guard on the Flagstaff, and galloped off to General Barnard and remonstrated. “You may certainly take the city by surprise, but whether you are strong enough to hold it is another matter.” Of course Graves knows Delhi well; a month ago he was in command there. Well, this staggered all the head-quarters people; they talked and argued, so time was lost; day broke, and we were ordered back to camp, just when I had hoped to rescue Louisa and Florence.’

Soon after another malcontent appeared: it was Hodson. After greeting the Whitbys, he began: ‘I am both annoyed and disappointed at our plans not having been carried out, for I am confident they would have been successful. The rebels were cowed, and perfectly ignorant of any intention of so bold a stroke on our part as an assault; the surprise would have done everything. I came to you, Whitby, because you and your wife have experienced a double disappointment, for, in addition to the public misfortune, you have private reasons to lament the blundering of those people who have kept us out of Delhi; but I can only hope that a few days’ farther delay will not make the position of your friends more dangerous.’

Eleanor sobbed as if her heart would break; it was not until then that she realized how confident she had been of the speedy return of those she loved. ‘My poor Florence! I feel in despair,’ she cried. ‘I fear now they will never return—never. It was very cruel to put off the attack, when the authorities knew their very lives depended upon a speedy rescue.’

‘Only Barnard and myself were aware of the peril of those English ladies, Mrs. Whitby,’ answered Hodson. ‘The camp is full of spies, and our only hope of saving them is by absolute secrecy.’

‘Come—come, my dear madam,’ said Maunders, who at this moment entered, ‘you in tears; you, who are as brave as any man in the camp, and, by Gad! braver than many

I know ! I thought to have seen you laughing and feasting, now this mad-cap plan of attack has been given up. It was sheer insanity ; the result of Barnard being advised by beardless subalterns. Now, Hodson, man, fire-eater that you are—don't look as if you would like to make mincemeat of me—I maintain that Graves' conduct was absolutely providential,' and he glanced in the direction where Providence is supposed to reside. 'The fact is, could anything be more ridiculous than to think that our little handful of English could take that great city by a determined rush ?'

Major Maunders was rather of the opinion of Private Briggs, that 'the army is a very good situation in times of peace.' A well-ordered, faultless mess-table, a fine brand of wine, agreeable female society, mild flirtations on a strictly Platonic basis, the retailing of slightly scandalous tales of a *risqué* nature ; these made up the sum of his existence. No ; Maunders was not heroic ! He was the average middle-aged man of club life and mess-room honours ; but oh ! the irony of Fate to cast him among showers of shot, hand-to-hand encounters, bloodthirsty enemies, and blood-curdling adventures. His was not a great soul, far from it ; but then, like others, he did his duty. Where all were brave, it required huge moral courage to run away, but because, poor old gentleman ! his cheek would turn pale, and his hand tremble, while he was at heart a coward, it was far braver of him, than of Hodson, never to seek a place of safety for his beautifully rounded form, which, on camp diet and war alarms, was rapidly losing its gracefully curved lines.

'I was not crying about the attack,' said Eleanor ; 'it is the disappointment, the danger of Florence, Burke, and, indeed, the others.'

'There now,' said the Major soothingly, 'I came to tell you that I have a letter from Miss Page. Last night we were standing silently in a garden, waiting for the advance to sound, in the midst of a grove of lemon trees, so close together that you could not see a person a yard or two away. In other places the ground was so treacherous that when you placed your foot on what looked like grass, you would find yourself up to your armpits in mire, and out of such a swamp Wake and three privates drew me, with my uniform much injured. I was slightly out of breath, and was seated, fanning myself, when suddenly Carew's witch was at my side. How she got there I don't know ; whether

from behind a bush, or out of a hole, or through the air on a broomstick, Heaven only knows. I was quite startled, and would have shouted, "Aroint thee, cursed witch!" which is the right thing to say to an uncanny hag; and very supernatural she looked, her eyes gleaming wildly as she put a long thin finger to her lips and whispered, "Hush! hush!" or what means that in her lingo; then she gave me a letter and disappeared.' He opened a coloured silk bag and drew out a paper. 'It is from Miss Page, and addressed to me, and is a long letter too. She says that Doobghur is flying from Delhi, back to his fort, which he intends to hold against all comers, if he can get out of the city. The Newab sends a letter also, but, being written in his own language, I don't understand it. Here, Hodson, this is in your line. Miss Page writes in a fright that the King's sons have heard through an informer that Doobghur has possession of Ali Kareem's treasure, and they have ordered Doobghur to give it up. They will not believe his denial of the report, and threaten to torture and kill him, therefore he and his wives are flying, taking Miss Page with them. It was proposed to kill Florence, Carew, Burke, and Sims; it seems that harbouring Christians is a criminal offence, but the witch of Megara, having a special friendship for Carew, has spirited them all away.'

'Where are they gone?' asked Eleanor.

'Miss Page does not know. There! read the letter for yourself,' he added, putting it into Eleanor's hands.

The somewhat incoherent epistle was written in a clear flowing hand; no names were mentioned, only initials, and certain parts were in French.

Hodson now read Doobghur's letter. 'He says that by the beard of his father, and his own head, he has reflected on the error of his ways, and that he will join the English "with his sword, his money, and his life." This is a good thing as far as it goes,' added Hodson, 'because his fort and hamlet lie between this and Meerut, and he has some local influence.'

'But is he to be believed?' demanded Wake; 'these people are such treacherous villains; and he attacked the English fugitives, you know.'

'We are not certain yet whether it was he or the mob who did so,' answered Hodson. 'We do know that he has saved some fugitives, possibly for a ransom, but still they

are alive. Doobghur, of course, is trimming, now he thinks our star is rising again. Moreover, he knows that the King of Delhi will claim his right to the treasure of Ali Kareem. Moslem justice (or injustice) does not linger with leaden heels like the British law. "Produce the treasure, or be bastinadoed or have your head cut off!" There is no room for a lawyer Sims in the rule of the King of Delhi, and Doobghur probably finds the law of the Prophet a little too rapidly arbitrary, when it is brought home to him.'

Hodson and Maunders soon left together, and, as they walked in the morning among the tents, the camp-followers were lighting their fires for cooking, the smoke of which rose from the ground.

'That poor girl Miss Page is in a deplorable position,' said Maunders; 'poor Louisa.'

'She is safe enough,' replied Hodson coldly; 'but I am terribly anxious about Miss Rawley and the men. I must move heaven and earth—if they still live—to get them sent into camp.'

'But why are they in greater danger? Poor old Rawley's daughter is the sweetest girl; everyone liked her—I don't believe even a native could kill her. Then there is Burke, such a nice boy! and Carew, a man with at least six thousand a year!'

'Miss Page is safe enough; she has arranged for her own preservation by apostatising,' said Hodson.

'What do you mean?' asked Maunders.

'I mean that she has turned Mahomedan, or pretended to do so,' answered Hodson.

'Good God!' cried the Major; 'can this be true? I knew she was unscrupulous, but this is too much!'

'This news was brought me long ago by my spies,' said Hodson, 'but it was far too humiliating a thing to publish. Life is sweet—to some—but, thank Heaven! few English are capable of being renegades! Although, in judging and condemning Miss Page, we must not forget that she is not purely English: her mother was a Mahomedan Cashmerie.'

'That means she is a half-caste!' said Maunders. 'But, bless my soul! she is so fair—fairer than most English-women.'

'That is often the case with people of mixed race,' answered Hodson; 'but her character is very un-English. Of course, I heard all about her at Mooltan; the old father made money

in the commissariat in the Punjaub campaign—not very honestly, I fear. So poor Louisa! Unlimited Loo! Languishing Loo! what with a native mother and a dishonest father, has not had much chance of acquiring a fine code of honour.’

‘I wash my hands of her,’ cried Maunders indignantly. ‘I hope she will never come back to bother us. She has turned Mahomedan, has she? Let her stick to the natives then. I shan’t tell Wake this; the fellow would blow out my brains, hers, and his own, if he heard it!’

‘It is a sickening affair,’ assented Hodson; ‘keep the whole thing dark, Major Maunders.’

The following day, the 13th of June, was very quiet, being signalised by no engagement, but on the night of the 14th a sharp attack was made upon the English position; the 60th N.I., having mutinied not far off, ‘tried their’ prentice hands’ upon their old masters. This became the order (or disorder) of those times; every regiment in Northern India, as it rebelled, joined the King of Delhi, and, the day after arriving in the city, went forth to drive away the accursed foreigners from the Ridge; and yet they always failed.

The 60th N.I. went back utterly disheartened and beaten, but still the English lost men and officers they could ill spare. On the 18th June Hodson was very ill with inflammation of the lungs, and on the 20th two thousand of the enemy with six guns attacked three hundred English soldiers with one gun, in the rear of the English camp. Five hundred rebels were slain, and only fifty English soldiers killed; but Colonel Belcher (Quartermaster-General) was wounded, and also the commandant of the Guides. Hodson had been ordered by General Barnard to perform the duty of both these officers. He was particularly asked to take the command of his old regiment, the Guides. He also had the sole working of the Intelligence Department, besides the command of Hodson’s Horse, the cavalry regiment he had just raised. To fulfil the duties of these four appointments must have been rather a hard task for a man not able to sit his horse from illness. Let it be recorded that one plucky Englishman did all this, and that too in June, under the heat of a burning Indian sun.

On the 23rd of June the enemy attacked the English on all sides. It was the centenary of the battle of Plassey, and there was a superstition current among the natives that the Company’s rule would end this day, just one hundred

years after it had been established. The prophecy came true in part. John Company died in 1857, but this did not put an end to English rule, as the natives had hoped. It was a long day of hard fighting beneath a destroying sun; and when night fell, in spite of all their bravery, superstitions, and superior numbers, the rebels had not gained a yard of land.

Ever since Whitby had been so terribly wounded, he and his wife had met with universal kindness and sympathy from everyone in the camp. The officers, when free, would wander into his tent and marvel at the neatness and precision of all his surroundings, brought about by the devotion of his wife and servants, and admired the calm serenity with which he bore his sufferings, while never a murmur or an impatient word escaped him.

'Oh, my darling!' his wife would say, 'it is a pleasure to wait on you; you are thankful for the smallest thing; you are a perfect saint.' Much as she had always esteemed and trusted her husband, in the touchstone of suffering and affliction she thought his sweetness and patience divine.

'When you are near me, Eleanor,' he would reply, 'the dark spirit of discontent leaves me as if by magic.' And so, united in heart and soul, they bore the long weary months of inactivity and danger. June and July had passed; still Delhi had not fallen.

On the 5th of July General Barnard died. He was a high-minded, excellent officer, and was deeply regretted by all in camp.

One day in July, Wake came rushing into his sister's tent. His cheek was blanched, his hair stood on end, and his manner was so excited that she was alarmed.

'The enemy are in camp, and we are beaten at last!' she cried.

'No, no—not that; but worse than that for me! I have seen Louisa, and we are too late—too late!'

'Where did you see her, Hal?'

'I was standing by a gun on the Mound battery,' he replied. 'The miserable artillerymen were utterly worn out by heat and want of sleep, having worked that gun eight hours in the sun. "Sleep, my men!" I said; "and if Pandey shows his head, I will do your work." The poor fellows grinned. "You've never been found napping, sir," they said as they laid themselves down on the ground,

where they soon fell sound asleep. It was just getting dusk, Eleanor, about seven o'clock, when, glancing along the Ridge, I saw something white coming, and at first I thought it was one of the camp-followers, who are generally dressed in white ; but as it came near, and it passed quite close to me, I saw the fair hair and the clear-cut features (in profile) of Louisa ! She did not stop to notice me, nor even turn her eyes towards the spot where I stood, but moved over the ground with a gliding tread. I was spell-bound for a time, she looked so real and human. "Louisa !" I cried at last ; but she did not stop ; she moved along, walking not on earth, but on the air, at the same height as the Ridge, but away from me in the direction of the Red House, now roofless ; and then I saw that the windows of that hateful place were all ablaze with light. I called out, and some of the men in the battery awoke with a start, and jumped up ; they thought, of course, the enemy were coming on. "Do you see those lights ?" I said, pointing to the house. Louisa was still visible to me, though looking like a small white cloud floating in mid-air. They all saw the lights, but the speck of distant cloud had disappeared. I asked leave of Murray, who was commanding the post, to go and see what those lights were. "That is a deserted building, Wake," he said, "and some camp-followers have lit a fire there, that's all."

"A dozen fires," I said, "in order to account for that tremendous blaze." For every window of the straggling place was brilliantly illuminated with a fierce crimson glow.

"It looks odd," said Murray ; "it must be a conflagration. Take two men, and go and find out what it is."

We rushed down from the Ridge to the sutlers' camp, which is close to the deserted buildings of the old cantonments. We obtained torches and entered the ruins of the Red House, which I had not seen since the night of the 10th of May, when Louisa and I parted there ; but I could still trace all the familiar rooms, for although the roof had fallen in, the two stories of empty windows stood black against the clear blue sky. Rank weeds and grass had grown over the rubbish, but there was no sign of a fire nor any token that the utter desolation had been interfered with. As we groped about, a bazaar-sergeant, an old English soldier, came up to us, and we told him we had seen a bright light from the Ridge, and that I had been sent to discover its

cause. "Folks do see lights here," he answered; "corpse-candles, as they call them. I have seen them myself dancing about, and they say they come from phosphorus, like the lucifer-matches; but not a native will come near the place, thinking it is full of evil spirits. Before the mutiny, sir, the house was always supposed to be haunted; and lately a European gentleman, Major Page, was killed there, and since that the ghosts have given more trouble than ever."

'Once I should have laughed at this story,' continued Wake, 'but now I see its ghastly significance. Louisa loved her father better than me always, and now that she is dead she goes where she last saw him, and possibly, for all I know, his spirit still lingers there, for poor old Page was never buried.'

'But we do not know that Louisa is dead,' reasoned his sister; 'we can still hope.'

'She is dead—just killed!' he said; 'and this is why she has been permitted to show herself. There she is again,' he went on wildly—'there! She is looking at Whitby sleeping—she is leaning over his bed.'

'I can see nothing,' answered Eleanor, as calmly as she could. 'You must be mistaken.'

'No, she is there. Now she is moving away—she has disappeared.'

Eleanor looked at her brother in blank dismay. 'Are such things possible?' she asked; 'you are dreaming!'

'No, she is dead,' again Wake replied. 'I shall never see her more. She was not orthodox. She believed in no revelation. Is it possible that, in consequence, she will be damned? If so, I would follow her to perdition; I would rather be among the lost with her, than the blessed without her. What had she done, poor girl, to be miserably murdered by those fiends? I will never give quarter to any of them again.'

He soon had an opportunity of putting his wild threats into execution, for the alarm sounded from all sides. Wake rushed off to his post, and the English troops hurried to repulse the enemy.

Early in July a very able man arrived in camp, Baird Smith, an accomplished engineer, who knew every inch and crevice in Delhi, and whose knowledge, united to his soldierly qualities, greatly assisted his countrymen when at last the city fell into their hands. Although all on the Ridge of

Delhi did their duty in spite of numerous enemies, heat and sickness, they owed much of their success to John Lawrence, who nobly aided them in sending, from the Punjaub, troops, ammunition, and food.

But in the camp on the Ridge one alarm followed another in quick succession. The 9th of July was a rainy morning, a thick mist covered the tents, when suddenly a great outcry arose on all sides, 'Treachery in camp! treachery in camp!' Some artillery horses with their traces cut rushed past Eleanor's tent, and then about a hundred Indian troopers in white linen coats and red turbans galloped wildly by, brandishing their swords and vociferating lustily, while at no great distance she saw a gun upset, and was near enough to observe a tall native struggling with a boyish young officer, who, in national fashion, was defending himself with his fists. Then she saw his assailant fall, blood spirting over the rebel's white shirt, he having been shot by a tall, dark Englishman, also on foot, who now came forward to the help of his brother-officer. These two Englishmen were plucky Jemmy Hills and 'Cupid' Tombs, one of the handsomest men in the English Force. It appeared that the revolted 8th Irregular Cavalry had penetrated into the camp, and that Jemmy Hills had charged the enemy, alone, to gain time for his guns to come up; he would have been overpowered by numbers had not Tombs rescued him. This was but one incident of that terrible day.

'The enemy have got into camp,' shouted Maunders, as he ran past; some of the privates of the 200th Regiment were ready in a second, Wake marching off with his company.

That night was a miserable one—ominous as the magic lights Wake had seen were the camp-fires of the enemy, plainly visible in the rear of the English position. The rebels had at length established themselves on three sides of the English defenders of the Ridge.

Early in August, Nicholson arrived; his coming had been eagerly looked for in camp, and when he at length appeared, all hoped that, with the strong reinforcements he had brought, the English would soon take Delhi. On the 25th, a battle was fought among the swampy land of Nujufghur, in which the rebels met with a heavy reverse.

There was nothing but quarrelling and disunion among the revolters in Delhi, there was an utter want of talented

leaders and proper subordination in their social inferiors ; while on the Ridge, from General to private, the English all pulled together as one man.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VICTORY.

ONE night in August, Eleanor was seated near her husband's curtainless bed, sewing by the dim light of a native lamp, which consisted of a smoking wick dipped in oil, issuing from a rough, antique-shaped earthen jar. Whitby had been delirious, and was murmuring incoherent speeches, giving orders to imaginary troops, or venting his indignation against visionary blundering. But the fever having subsided, he had fallen into a calm sleep, and his wife feared to move, or scarcely breathe, lest she should wake him, for, in his critical state, unbroken repose was absolutely necessary.

Eleanor heard first a slight noise, like someone scratching with the fingers on the canvas of the tent, then a low voice said, 'Mem Sahib!' For a moment she felt alarmed, but quickly recovering herself, she went to the door of the tent, where she found a handsomely-dressed native. He saluted her in the graceful and dignified Eastern manner, touching his forehead with his hand : 'I would speak with Whitby Sahib,' he said respectfully.

Eleanor raised a warning finger, and pointed to the bed. 'He sleeps,' she said ; 'he is very ill.' She feared this stranger ; suspicion and mistrust now reigned in the most generous and confiding minds, there being at that time among the English an antipathy to the whole Indian race, justified in part, if not wholly, by their base vices of treachery and cruelty. 'When the master wakes he will speak with you,' she said, and the stranger bowed and withdrew saying :

'My mission is urgent, and private ; I will come again to-night.'

Later in the night two men were in earnest conversation in Whitby's tent ; they represented in appearance and manner fair types of the European and Asiatic races. Whitby, large-limbed, with a square-shaped head, high forehead, fearless eyes, and the tone of one more used to command than obey, with a business-like habit of arriving at the root of a matter without waste of time or laboured

ceremony, while the Moslem was short in statue, and small-boned, his manner suave, though gravely decorous, and studiously polite, and exasperatingly circumlocutional. 'The nightingale-faced Sahib is away on a foray,' said the latter. 'May his destiny be propitious!'

'Yes,' assented Whitby, 'Hodson has gone to take Rohtuck. What do you want, Moulvie? He is in no danger?'

'It is reported in camp that he is in great peril, but, though he has but a handful of troopers, and the rebels in number are like the sand of the sea, Hodson Sahib is protected by his own valour and prudence. Is he not a great warrior, a lover of justice and an upholder of oaths with distinguished courtesy?'

Whitby laughed, but it pleased him to hear that the friend he so greatly admired was so highly valued by this alien. 'But, Rujub Ali, what brings you here?'

'Ah!' sighed the old man, 'what is written is written! My fate is heavy, your illustrious Excellency.'

'In the name of common-sense, man, speak out; tell me what has happened.'

'Your slave acted for the best, Sahib, but the outcome thereof was disastrous. I swear by the power that created me that I meant only good, but I was unwise.'

'What have you done?'

The old Moulvie explained that the Newab of Doobghur had opened negotiations with him unknown to, and in the absence of Hodson; in fact, while he was away on service, attacking the town of Rohtuck. The Moulvie—who was head spy in the Intelligence Department—fearing for the safety of the hostages then in the power of Doobghur, had liberally promised the Newab, by letter, that he should be allowed to retain all the treasure of Ali Kareem, so much bullion, so much coin, so many jewels, and so many vessels of gold and silver, according to the original list of the hidden wealth, a copy of which had been sent to the Moulvie. 'For, Sahib,' said the old man, 'it does not cost a pice to promise, and I only thought to quiet his mind.' But the Moulvie's messenger had been taken prisoner, and conveyed to the King of Delhi's palace. Mogul Mirza, the King's nephew, was one of the prime movers and heads of the rebellion, displaying more energy and ability than most of the vicious house of Timour, from which he had sprung,

and at once he sent orders to Doobghur to give up the treasure to the crown, as by legal right (being treasure trove) it belonged not to any private individual, but to the lord paramount—the King of Delhi. Doobghur, in return, declared that he had no treasure, ‘the English had taken it,’ but he was not believed; his house was attacked by the King’s Guard, and he was killed, defending his property. Then the mob, and the mutineers, hearing that he was a spy in the pay of the English, and that he absolutely harboured Christians, set fire to his palace. All his valuable property was taken by the King, and his women and the English ladies sent into the palace.

‘This is dreadful,’ said Whitby; ‘can nothing be done to save them?’

‘They have not killed Miss Page, although she was found in the house of a traitor. Hush!’ he whispered mysteriously, ‘Miss Rawley, too, may yet be alive.’

‘This is good news, Moulvie.’

‘I hear Miss Page is so fair of speech that she could turn clods of earth into lumps of sugar; moreover, she is a true believer.’

‘What? Apostatised? Impossible!’

‘My words are true, Sahib; but Hodson Sahib in charity covers the fact with a veil of secrecy, that her countenance may not be blackened in the eyes of the English.’

‘And Miss Rawley?’

‘Sahib, there is a prisoner in the camp, a witch; far be it from me that such a one should be my friend! She is styled the Witch of Megara. Her extreme age, her bad character, and her ugliness are undoubted, and she came out on horseback and fought against the English like a fiend. The General at first released her, not knowing how mischievous she would be among the superstitious, but Hodson Sahib, before he left, persuaded him to allow her to be retaken. She is now in custody, and is to be immediately despatched to Umballa, and before she goes, she begs as a favour to see the countenance of your Excellency. But of what avail is it to imprison her? the bar, or bolt, is not yet forged which can keep a magician in durance. Has she not escaped before? She will do so again.’

‘I will see the Witch of Megara,’ answered Whitby; smiling; ‘far be it from me that she should not be my friend! She saved my life.’

‘Defend us from those who use the incantation of knots. Sahib, juggle not with the devil! She is the agent of Eblis! But for your protection, and that of the lady, I have brought with me this all-powerful charm, which you must hold in your hand when she comes into the tent.’ He produced a scrap of vellum, on which was written these words from the Koran :

‘In the name of the most Merciful God: Say, I fly for refuge unto the Lord of the day-break, that he may deliver me from the mischief of those things which he hath created; and from the mischief of the night, when it cometh on; and from the mischief of women blowing on knots; and from the mischief of the envious, when he envieth.’

The Moulvie, in common with all Mahomedans, had an implicit faith in the efficacy of the words written above, considering them as a sovereign specific against magic, lunar influences, and the temptations of the evil spirit, and he never failed to repeat them evening and morning.

Whitby courteously thanked Rujub Ali for his amiable intentions; and told him, being in possession of such a potent talisman, he had no hesitation in receiving the witch, and desired he would bring her at once.

The witch was soon brought by a guard to the door of Whitby’s tent, into which she was conducted by the half-reluctant Moulvie.

The old woman had iron chains on her skinny arms and small wasted bare legs; her face seemed more than ever wrinkled, and her deep-set black eyes glittered like diamonds.

‘You wish to speak to me?’ said Whitby kindly; he could not help pitying the woman’s humiliating position.

‘Yes, your Excellency. Listen! Death is hateful to the aged. To wander in Hades a spectre—a shade among other aimless shadows—aimless, yet malevolent and spiteful. This is death! This is hell! Will your Excellency obtain my life?’

‘Yes, I can, and will,’ replied Whitby, knowing that the fact of her having saved the lives of Europeans was enough to secure her pardon.

‘And will your Excellency give me that crystal which, to those who know how to use it, prevents death? In exchange, I will tell you a secret you would gladly know. Vulgar minds alone love money! But knowledge, power, youth, and to be again a queen—as once I was—before

whom all bowed, and all obeyed. That is life! Will you get me the crystal which Wake Sahib wears?—and I will tell you what you would give your heart's blood to know.'

Whitby promised he would try to procure the crystal, that is, if Wake would part with it. He knew he was strangely superstitious about it.

'Can your Excellency withstand destiny? Have not hundreds of English, men, women, and children, perished? Yet you, and those you love, survive.'

'God's good providence protected us,' said Whitby.

'It was destiny—it was hammered upon your forehead; you were spared and others killed! I saved you and your Mem Sahib, not from gratitude, though you were ever kind to your slave. Am I not wise? Can I not see signs hidden from others? I knew that to fight against you was useless; you are the favourite of fortune, and through you I foresaw I should one day obtain that magic crystal which gives love, joy, youth, and that prosperity from which I have been so long a stranger! Listen! Miss Rawley is concealed in the house of an Afghan. The King of Delhi, although a true believer, is a great oppressor, and sent soldiers to the palace of Doobghur, whose servants and himself were killed. Miss Rawley was left for dead in the ruins of the house, and that night she was taken away by some Afghans, and is hidden near the dwelling of the high priest, whose house stands close to the Turcoman Gate, and adjoins the great mosque. Let Hodson Sahib send there. Does he know all that happens in Delhi? Ask him; he will see that the words of the old woman are true.'

'But the others?' demanded Whitby.

'What care I for the others? Is the web of their lives intertwined with mine? Miss Page was taken into the King's palace, and'—here she, with a significant gesture, drew her finger across her throat—'doubtless such was her fate! Send to the priest's house eight nights from this, at the hour of one. Let some of Hodson Sahib's Afghans go; and by the beard of the Prophets, I swear they shall bring back the young girl! When she has arrived, your Excellency will remember your promise, and give your slave the crystal and her freedom!'

'But Hodson is away,' said Whitby. 'What can be done?'

'He will be back in seven days,' answered the old woman.

She then produced a piece of rope, in which several knots were curiously tied. She seemed to regard this attentively, holding it close to her face; seeing which necromantic performance the Moulvie shuddered visibly, and began muttering his prayers.

The old witch laughed. 'The infidel, Hodson, rides through the night,' she said, in a strange shrill voice. 'The sound of his horse's hoofs is heard from Delhi to Rohilcund! The true believers are defeated, and Rohtuck is in the hands of the English! The Hindoos—sons of burnt fathers—are jubilant! Ah! he has found them. They bring out two Sahibs—Burke Sahib and Carew Sahib. They look ill—their mothers would not know them—starved and dirty are they, resembling wild beasts rather than lordly rulers.'

'What do you mean, woman?' said Whitby, interrupting this rhapsody.

'Burke Sahib and Carew Sahib are safe,' she answered. 'They will be here within eight days.'

The old woman was soon after led away, leaving Whitby and the Moulvie in that curious half-dazed, half-credulous frame of mind which ensues when what we call the supernatural is brought intimately into our lives.

'God grant,' said Whitby fervently, 'that her rope has told us the truth;' while the Moulvie audibly recited, 'Deliver us from the temptations of Satan.'

The witch's prophecy came true. Some seven days later, Burke and Carew rode into the camp, accompanying Hodson's small force. They had escaped from Delhi, and had been hidden for some time in the house of a friendly Brahmin, and, on the English taking Rohtuck, were rescued much as the old woman had described. It was indeed a red-letter day, not only for the Whitbys, but for the 200th, when their missing friends were once more among them. By dint of bribes and negotiations, Hodson also succeeded in getting Florence Rawley brought into the English camp.

It was one night towards the end of August, and the glorious moonlight was streaming over the tents where all lay wrapt in slumber, except the sentries, silently pacing up and down their beat, when a small litter, shrouded in red drapery, and carried by two strong men in Asiatic dress, came along the broad street of the camp, and drew up before Whitby's pavilion; the curtains of the equipage were hastily drawn aside, and Florence Rawley threw herself into

her cousin's arms ! She looked the very shadow or spectre of her former self. After the first excitement of this joyful meeting had subsided, Florence, in answer to her friends' anxious inquiries, said to them : 'After I was wounded in Doobghur's house, I remained unconscious until night fell, and then, on opening my eyes, saw an Afghan youth by my side, and then, he, with another Afghan, carried me away. As I could not speak to them, I do not know who sent them, or why they came ; but from the kindness with which they had treated me, I believe they acted from motives of the purest humanity. I heard that Louisa Page and Mr. Sims were taken into the King's Palace ; but Miss Page had become quite like a native. She never cared for me, and although we were imprisoned in the same house I rarely saw her, for she was not treated like the rest of the prisoners by the natives, but as one of themselves.'

Long suspense, terror, and her wound, added to the bad climate, had worn poor Florence to the bone, and made her nervous and melancholy ; but she soon recovered her health and spirits in the society of Burke and her friends. The joy of such reunion after great perils none can know, except those who have experienced them.

It was not until the 20th September that Delhi fell into the hands of the English. It took three days' hard fighting and cost many a valuable life, including that of the great soldier, General Nicholson, before they gained the place. On the 21st September the welcome order arrived for the Delhi Field Force to evacuate the Ridge and enter the conquered city.

Whitby was borne in on a litter, and his wife, riding Ariel, followed. Maunders, Burke, Carew, and Florence, with others of the 200th, accompanied them ; but as they descended into a hollow known as the ' Valley of Death,' from the number of men on both sides who had been slain there, a strange and weird procession met them. *Væ Victis !* Coming out of the city was a multitude of women, children, and a few decrepid old men, the English having been obliged to drive all the non-combatants out of the town. They walked along, a strange crowd, many of them Moslem ladies, dressed in gold brocades, who had scarcely ever before seen the light of open day—life-long prisoners behind their harem walls, they were bewildered and amazed at finding them-

selves wandering, for the first time, in the open day, and, still more, in a world of armed men. Many of the dejected natives carried bundles of their property, for the crowd was mainly composed of the poorer classes, clad in draperies of dingy white, leading their children by the hand; and now it may be mentioned, to the credit of the victors, that not a single instance of women or children being ill-used came to public notice.

The Whitbys entered the King's Citadel, which is a magnificent series of palaces and gardens surrounded by splendidly decorated walls sixty feet high; for the Turkish rulers of India defended their throne, not by the loyal love of a grateful people, but by bastions, cannon, and mercenary guards. The Whitbys passed through the magnificent, although gloomy, entrance of the Lahore Gate—'the finest entrance to any palace in the world'—and then found themselves in a closely-built town of palaces and mosques, all standing in gardens full of rose-trees and lemon groves, irrigated with running water, brought there through white marble conduits. The King of Delhi's Palace, like that of Grenada, contained some world-renowned and uniquely beautiful structures, such as the Pearl Mosque, the Hall of Audience, and many other magnificent buildings. But when the English entered this citadel they found everything in a state of dirt and disrepair, having an atmosphere of disorder and neglect (peculiarly Eastern) which hung round the place like a curse. The English were in Delhi! None but those who fought through the first six weeks of the campaign know on what a thread the lives of the English and the safety of the Empire hung, or can appreciate the sufferings and exertions of those days of watchfulness and combat, of fearful heat and exhaustion, of trial and danger. They could only look back on them with a feeling of almost doubt whether they were real or only a foul dream.

The day was a memorable one in the annals of the Empire; the restoration of British rule in the East dates from the 20th September, 1857

The Whitbys had established themselves in Mirza Mogul's palace, the rooms of which were arched and lofty, but solidly built, and reached by winding stairs and colonnaded verandas. After the continual roar of guns and the excitement of war in the camp, it seemed that the very stillness of death had fallen upon these palaces, and the silence was

absolutely painful. Delhi seemed, indeed, a city of the dead, for all its inhabitants had been turned out—not only from the palace, but from every part of the town itself. The Whitbys and their friends felt ill at ease under the unaccustomed shelter of a roof, although Whitby himself had borne the journey well, for the exhilaration of English success was the best possible tonic for him and all the wounded.

Still the palace had hateful memories. They passed through the court where the English prisoners (nearly all women and children) had been massacred, and they saw, with a shudder, the lofty gloomy palace of that human fiend, Abu Bukt, the King's son, in which abode possibly Louisa had suffered, as her fate was uncertain, or in whose hands it might be that she still remained. The edifice awoke too hateful recollections for them to feel desirous of visiting it, and Wake regarded its exterior with a fierce scowl, a very hell of vindictive passion surging up in his heart. But in the palace adjoining theirs they saw a long file of covered carriages, palanquins, and pedestrians arrive. It was the old King, with his favourite Queen, Zeenut Mahal, and her son. Hodson had ridden six miles out, and, from amidst a throng of followers, guards, and soldiers, he, single-handed, had taken the old man prisoner, promising him his life.

That night, when all else was hushed in sleep, Henry Wake came to his sister's apartment, looking agitated and disturbed.

'Oh, Nell!' he said, 'Louisa has come again. I had been sleeping, when I felt a blast of cold air sweep over me, and I saw my wife. She stood and beckoned me to follow her. Shall I do so?'

'I certainly should—that is, my dearest, if you really saw her.'

'Will you come with me, or are you afraid?'

'I will come,' she said; and, rising, she threw on a white dressing-gown and followed him.

She hardly knew what to think; her brother seemed terribly in earnest, though she herself saw nothing. It was a strange midnight walk in the clear moonlight, which fell on the domed palaces and straight garden-walks of the Mogul's citadel. They were in the zenana of Abu Bukt's palace, which was inclosed by gardens mingled with courts, paved with marble. Wake followed the beckoning form (which he still averred he saw) through corridors and

colonnades, and then into a wilderness-garden of fruit-trees and flowers: before them lay a straight canal or artificial pond.

'She stops!' cried Wake; 'she points to the water, and turns and smiles the old smile—triumphant and bewitching. It is her very self. Poor Louisa! There!—she has disappeared utterly. Does she mean that the treasure of Ali Kareem has been buried here? I will have the water drawn off to-morrow, then I shall see.'

'Do you think she would trouble about money now?' asked his sister.

'Yes,' he replied; 'it is the "master-passion strong in death." You do not know how wedded she was to that wealth. It was but natural—we all love money.'

The next day Wake had the water of the canal turned off from its source, and found that the bottom was formed of strong cement, but there was no sign of the missing wealth.

Still the ghost was not laid; she came again. Then Wake caused an excavation to be made in the bottom of the pond, which revealed a substantial arched cellar filled with valuables; a vast hoard of wealth, including part of the treasure of Ali Kareem; however, Wake did not make his luck publicly known.

He obtained leave of absence to visit Umballa soon after, and succeeded in secretly conveying his wealth to that city on thirty bullock-carts. The idea which Wake once held that this treasure was accursed had completely left his mind, since the outbreak of the mutiny had plunged him into the sternest realities of life, which had not left him leisure to indulge in dreamy imaginings; moreover, after the disappearance of Louisa, a feeling of hatred and revenge against the natives had taken complete possession of his mind, so much so that he was fiercely resolved that no Asiatic should glory in owning the wealth of Ali Kareem. Wake might have felt more scrupulous about defrauding the British Prize Agents, but he looked upon this money as his private property, acquired before the war, and therefore loot to which the army had no right. But while he was still seeking for the treasure, an extraordinary adventure befell him.

One day, as Wake was wandering about near the pond in the garden of Abu Bukt's palace, trying to discover the vault in which the treasure was hidden, he met a stranger, who, from his dress, appeared to be a native gentleman. He saw

that he had a young handsome face, with regular features, and those arched pencilled eyebrows and long, almond-shaped eyes so peculiarly Eastern. Where had he seen this man before?—he knew the countenance; surely this was the native that he had seen in Doobghur's palace. Wake rushed up to him and addressed him, but the very commonplace English-camp Hindostani he had acquired was barely intelligible to the Asiatic, while the latter's polished, high-flown Persian Urdoo was as Greek to Wake. He succeeded in making the young stranger understand that he would take him to an interpreter, to which proposition he willingly consented, and the two men soon found themselves in the presence of Whitby.

'Whitby,' said Wake excitedly, 'this is the fellow I saw in Doobghur's house; for God's sake find out what he says, and see if he can tell us of Louisa's fate. It would be better to know the worst.'

Whitby agreed, and listened to a long oration in the stranger's low silvery tones, a speech full of high-flown metaphor. 'He says,' explained Whitby, when the Asiatic had concluded, 'that Louisa is alive, and is desirous of seeing you.'

This sudden news quite took Wake's breath away, and then the blood surged with fierce violence to his beating heart. 'But wait, my dear fellow,' continued Whitby; 'though this man is most plausible, yet I feel that he is lying.'

'Why should he lie about this?'

'Because it is physical pain to most Asiatics to tell the truth; all men are liars, but *they* are incorrigible in matters of veracity. For one thing they always tell you what they think you wish to hear, from politeness, whether it is the fact or not.'

'But if Louisa still lives, where is she?'

'This Indian says she has been taken with all the court-ladies out of Delhi, and that she was with the Queen Zeenut Mahal at a palace near the magnificent mausoleum called Humayoon's tomb, about three miles from Delhi. He further states that, if you will go with him, he will conduct you to her, as he is her emissary.'

'I will go,' cried Wake passionately—'now, this minute!'

'Reflect awhile,' said Whitby calmly 'You know nothing of this fellow; but if you will persist in accompanying him,

you had better take some companions, or ask for an escort, and above all go well armed. It would be madness to venture into that place alone, for in the suburbs the numerous ruined buildings, as well as the more modern bazaars, are crowded with disaffected and madly fanatical townspeople, and disbanded Sepoys who have been turned out of Delhi. The murder of any Englishman, a straggler amongst them, is pretty certain; so be cautious.'

'Nonsense! Burke and Carew would go with me, I have no doubt; if not, I will go alone. But ask him, Whitby, who he is, and why he was in Doobghur's house?'

'He says he is the brother of Doobghur, but, for my own part, I believe him to be a spy of the Court of Delhi. They have their informers as well as we, but they have no clever brains to direct their Intelligence Department. The Mahomedans of Delhi have produced no master mind like Hodson, so that despite their numbers and their national aptitude for craft and guile, we beat them hollow in diplomacy.'

Shortly after the three Englishmen (for Burke and Carew were nearly as eager as Wake to discover Louisa) and the handsome native, with some of Wake's semi-military Rohilla horse-keepers, rode out in the early morning from the Selinghur gate of the palace. The little troop avoided the high-road, but galloped across the level fields, which mostly lay fallow. They soon accomplished the journey, and the great milk-white marble dome of the Humayoon memorial monument appeared in sight, at a short distance.

'Sahib,' said the guide, pointing to a building close at hand, 'this is the house—enter!'

The edifice stood in the midst of bare uncultivated fields; straw and cattle, with a few peasants and ploughs outside, giving the place the appearance of a farm or grange.

Wake and his friends rode through an archway into a courtyard, round the four sides of which were the numerous windows of the habitation. The guide dismounted and entered the house, and almost simultaneously with his disappearance every balcony and window became alive with red-coated Sepoys, while a hundred muskets were levelled at the English party. An effort was also made by the peasants to close the great wooden gates of the archway behind the entrapped Englishmen, but this was frustrated by the Rohilla horsemen.

‘Treachery! treachery, Sahib!’ they shouted. ‘You have been brought here to be murdered!’ Fly for your lives.’

The war-trained defenders of the Ridge required no second warning; as quick as thought they put spurs to their horses, and dashed through the midst of the unarmed peasants outside the gates. Helter-skelter they rode across the fields, never stopping until they found themselves upon the macadamized highway, close to Humayoon’s tomb.

As they drew rein and breath, Wake exclaimed, ‘That was a near shave! God bless the grooms who kept the gates open for us. What a fool I was to believe that smooth-tongued villain, and what on earth made those brutes try that game on us?’

However, as they reached the Humayoon’s tomb they found they had not come to the end of their difficulties, for their way was barred by an immense mob of men in a furious state of excitement. They seemed to be mostly unarmed, although some carried muskets, daggers or swords, and from their appearance were evidently Delhians of the mercantile class, and hangers-on of the Court, with here and there a soldier, but all mad with fanaticism and rage, shouting, ‘Fight for the Faith! Defend the princes! Death to the Nazarenes! Christian dogs! whose breath defiles the air and pollutes the earth! Defend the House of Timour! The Faith! Strike for the Faith!’ So dense was the throng that to attempt to ride through it was physically hopeless, but all at once there seemed to be a singular eddy in the crowd; the huge mass of human beings—like a stream—was slowly but surely moving backwards, though apparently unwillingly, but the mysterious cause which propelled these thousands at length appeared. It was only Hodson and another English officer—his subaltern Macdowell, a handsome young man of twenty—and with them were ten Sikh troopers.

‘Fall back!’ cried Hodson to the mob, in a tone of authority. ‘Go to your homes!’ and obedient in act, though not in soul, under the extraordinary mesmerism of his commanding will, his voice and stern face, the crowd fell back, step by step, sullenly, still uttering oaths and seditious outcries, like very demons.

‘What brings Hodson here, and where the devil is he driving those niggers?’ said Burke.

But the English hero had not observed Wake’s party, for

his keen blue eyes were never for one moment removed from the yelling crowd. Then, to their surprise, they saw Hodson and Macdowell, with five of the troopers, ride up the broad white marble flight of steps, and disappear under the great archway which led to the mausoleum.

'What is he doing? What a fellow he is!'

'Looting, of course,' answered Burke, who, although far from being ill-natured, and who owed his life to Hodson's brilliant raid, could not help repeating the current slander of the camp, that 'Hodson for ever risked his life only to fill his pockets.'

'No, no,' said Wake. 'He is catching some rebel leader, you may be sure.'

'Well! he has cleared the road effectually; let us ride back to Delhi.'

'Shall we go after Hodson?' asked Wake.

'No,' replied Carew; 'it is not our business.' (He might have added, 'It is too dangerous.')

'He would only snub us,' rejoined Burke. 'He is awfully down on any fellow who interferes with him.'

'Well,' assented Wake, 'we might spoil his little game, whatever it is, but we will wait here awhile, and then, if there is a row, we will go in sharp and help him, though he helps himself generally.' At these words a slightly satirical laugh came from Burke's lips.

'By Jove! Burke,' said Wake angrily, 'I don't mean that he steals; I mean that he relies more upon his own right arm to defend him than upon anyone else.'

They sent a groom to discover, if possible, what was taking place inside the building. He returned after some time, and told them that Hodson was disarming the rebels who had taken sanctuary in the mausoleum, and that three native princes, the actual leaders of the rebellion, Mirza Mogul, Mirza Kishere Sultamed and Abu Bukt, had been sent by him into Delhi under a guard just before Wake and his friends came up. This was why the mob was so furious; they had tried to prevent the princes from surrendering themselves, and failing, had planned a rescue, but, cowed by Hodson's determined manner, had given up their arms—five hundred guns, the same number of swords, and some war-horses.

Wake and his friends stayed a weary two hours under the red granite wall of the garden, over which the green trees

waved their branches. The sky above was intensely blue, and the bright sun shone pitilessly down upon them; from inside the enclosure came the deep hoarse roar of angry voices, but nothing worse—no sound of firing or conflict reached them. At last they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs. It was all right then: the mission was successful; and Hodson and Macdowell with the ten troopers came clattering down the stone steps. The stern look had disappeared from Hodson's face, and he was smiling and chatting gaily with his subaltern.

'Let us start; it is safe to follow Hodson.'

'Oh! is it?' said Carew. 'He rushes into every danger.'

'But he'll stick to a comrade through thick and thin, and he never blunders,' returned Wake.

They followed Hodson at a considerable distance; he went like the wind until the walls of Delhi were in sight, and then matters looked black indeed.

'I knew how it would be,' groaned the squire. 'This is awful; we shall never get out of it!'

At Humayoon's tomb Hodson had kept the followers of the King of Delhi in check, and had spent two hours in disarming them to gain time to enable his troopers to convey the three princes into Delhi. The royal cortège had proceeded slowly, for the prisoners were travelling in a crawling bullock-cart, but on their reaching the city suburbs the fanatical townspeople rose to rescue their late leaders.

As far as the eye could see was a raging mob, which crowded the streets, and yet angry men were still rushing from their houses like an infuriated swarm of bees. They roared, they shouted, they yelled, and brandished swords, sticks and clubs, which they freely used upon Hodson's troopers, eighty men who formed the guard in charge of the cart in which were the three princes.

'Let us turn back,' said Carew.

'You may,' answered Wake, 'but I follow Hodson!'

'And so do I,' said Burke.

They galloped through the crowd, Hodson and his troopers having cleared a way through the dense mass. The great captain had come up only just in time to quell this fresh outbreak. Had the rebels been successful in their undertaking, the Sikh guard would have been killed to a man, and also the few English who were present. Hodson did not hesitate, for he and his troopers were in imminent peril, but

with his usual quickness of decision, and by his promptitude, changed the whole aspect of the affair in a moment.

'Fight for the Faith! Rescue the princes! Kill the infidels!' roared the mob.

They then heard Hodson's clear voice say: 'Listen! These princes of Delhi are not worthy of the name of men. They tortured and murdered in cold blood fifty women and children in open day. The English Government have decreed their punishment, and I am determined that it shall be thorough.' Taking a carbine from one of his men, he deliberately shot down the princes, one after the other, and then ordered their bodies to be taken into the city and exhibited on the 'Chiboutra' in front of the head police-station, where the blood of their innocent victims could still be traced.

Wake and his party gave a hearty English cheer, in which they were joined by Hodson's Sikh Horse, and they commenced to breathe freely as the cowed mob slunk away. The regiment of Guides and the Sikhs of Hodson's Horse were wild with delight at the execution of the princes, and still more so at the exposure of their dead bodies in front of the police-station; it was on that very spot that the Great Mogul Aurungzebe, nearly two hundred years before, had exposed the head of Gooroo Teg Bahadoor, a great Sikh saint. A prophecy had long been current among them that by the help of a white man the Sikhs should conquer Delhi. They therefore called Hodson 'The Avenger of the Gooroo,' and they were the more ready to follow him anywhere.

The natives had also another curious superstition about Hodson. He had a most retentive memory, and was very observant of little things; moreover, he could grasp the ins-and-outs of a confused tale, and get at the real facts of a case. It was useless to try to lie or cheat him; and the simple Asiatics, not understanding the acumen of a highly trained gifted mind, thought he conversed with nature, especially with trees. 'It was the leaves of the trees that told him the rebels had passed that way, or that treachery was intended;' and Rujub Ali, who was ultra-superstitious, believed firmly in his supernatural gifts.

'We ought to feel much obliged to Hodson and to his heroic remedies,' said Wake, as they rode homewards. 'If we had not fallen in with him, the chances are that we should have been scragged on the road. But those princes

richly deserve their fate,' he added; 'don't you think so, Burke?'

'Serve them right,' answered the Irishman; 'they were fiendish villains.'

When they reached the Palace they told the Whitbys and Florence of their want of success, and also of the thrilling scene of which they had been unexpected spectators.

'Was it right or wrong to shoot those princes?' asked Eleanor, whose conscientious nature weighed everything.

'In my opinion he was right—all honour to him,' answered Whitby. 'He showed a marvellous quickness of judgment, and his wonderful readiness was splendid. In a fight Hodson is always glorious, and in a good hard scrimmage as happy as a king. A beautiful swordsman—he never fails to kill his man: and the way he used to play with the most brave and furious of these rebels was perfect. I fancy I see him now at that fight on the Ridge—where I was wounded—smiling, laughing, parrying fearful blows as calmly as if he were brushing off flies, calling out all the time, "Why, try again!" "Now, what's that?" "Do you call yourself a swordsman?" and so on. The fact is, he is Every Inch a Soldier, and to-day's good service proves it.'

'And yet, how they hate him,' said Eleanor; 'and what tales they tell to his discredit in camp!'

'There are two liars in camp,' said Whitby, 'who start these stories: one, the most dastardly wretch, who, in revenge for Hodson's daring to expose his incompetency, has been plotting against and slandering him, only too successfully, for years. What he says could not injure Hodson, but that the other, who is now in authority here, listens to his falsehoods, and reports them to Sir John Lawrence. This latter bears a grudge against Hodson, for being his brother Henry's favourite. If Barnard or Nicholson were still alive, they would soon put an end to this despicable backbiting, infamous always, but specially so when it is, as now, directed against one of the finest soldiers of this century.'

'I have a great deal to thank him for,' said Florence. 'No one but he could have saved me, and he also rescued Burke and Carew.'

'Yes, and the C.B.'s and the V.C.'s and the brevets will be given to people who have never perilled their precious lives; while Hodson, who has been under fire and on horseback continually for months, will get nothing—not even *kudos*.'

Rujub Ali declared (and possibly he knew) that Louisa had instigated the attempt to inveigle Wake into that lonely country-house. The spies of the Court had reported that he was likely to regain the treasure, and she hoped that by killing him she might obtain it for herself. 'For Ahmed Ali Khan, Doobghur's brother, is as handsome as Joseph,' said the old man, 'and she as wicked as Potiphar's wife. If she was innocent, then it must have been the last stroke played by the natives to recover the hoards of Ali Kareem.'

In time the Whitbys and Wake, with Ariel, returned to England, Captain Whitby retiring invalided on a small pension, augmented by an extra grant on account of his wound. Wake had become mysteriously rich; he bought back Wake Castle, which was, however, chiefly inhabited by his sister and her husband, for he had adopted the life of one of those wild Englishmen who wander in strange lands—Turkistan, Asia Minor, India, Arabia. He firmly believes that Louisa is dead, and that fate will yet bring him face to face with her murderer. His mission in life is to avenge her, and on this point he is mad.

Burke and Florence were married. They live happily, and are great favourites with the 200th Regiment.

Hodson was killed at Lucknow, after many more engagements. He received no substantial reward, and his memory has been industriously blackened.

Maunders was made a C.B.; but he and his friends, believing that he performed miracles of valour, consider he has been badly treated in not receiving the Victoria Cross.

After his return to England, Squire Carew gradually became not only a misogynist, but a misogynist, and leads a solitary life on his Essex estates.

Lawyer Sims' fate was never known; it is supposed that, like many others, he was murdered at Delhi.

The Witch of Megara was found hanged, suspended from a tree, but by whom it was done, or for what reasons, was never discovered; and the magic crystal she prized so much had disappeared.

And what was Louisa's fate? It was never clearly known; but there was no reason to believe she was murdered. Indeed, it is stated that she lives in semi-regal state and wealth in the city of Mecca.

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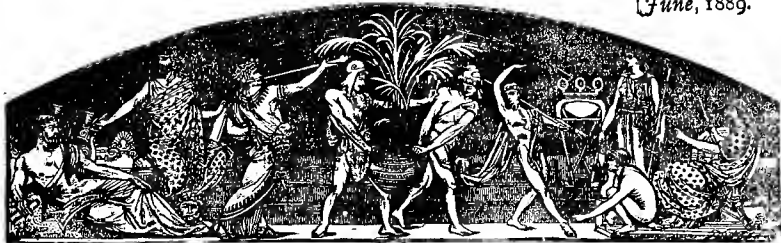
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